Menopause in the Workplace

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1. Introduction

The council is committed to providing an inclusive working environment for everyone who works there. The menopause is a natural part of a person's life, and it is not always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every individual does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

This document outlines the guidelines for members of staff and managers on providing the right support for those experiencing menopausal symptoms at work. It aims to help in recognising and addressing the workplace issues that can adversely impact on symptoms.

2. What is the menopause?

2.1 Perimenopause

The perimenopause, which is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause, can often last for four to five years although for some people it may continue for many more years or for others last just a few months. The symptoms may vary in individuals from mild to very significant. Many people do not always realise that they are experiencing the perimenopause and may not understand what is causing their symptoms. This can be a barrier to accessing support.

2.2 Menopause

The menopause is a natural part of the ageing process. It refers to the point in time when menstrual periods stop. This occurs naturally usually between the ages of 45 and 55; the average age in the UK is 51.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including: hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats and sleep disturbance, fatigue, poor concentration, irritability, mood changes, depression, anxiety, decreased memory and concentration. This is not a comprehensive list. Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years.

2.3 Postmenopause

After a person has not had a period for a year, they can be described as 'postmenopausal'. Most people experience symptoms for 4 years after their last period, and about 10% of individuals continue to experience symptoms up to 12 years after their last period, and 3% of individuals experience symptoms for the rest of their lives.

3.0 The menopause and work

Menopausal symptoms can interfere with a person's working life. The symptoms in themselves can be debilitating but can also result in anxiety with some people to losing confidence in their everyday and working abilities. Supporting people who are experiencing the menopause can help to ensure that they remain productive during this time.

3.1 Foster a supportive culture

It is recognised that the menopause can affect individuals in a variety of ways. Therefore, all situations need to be treated with empathy and compassion whilst recognising and respecting differences between individuals.

To ensure empathy and compassion, it is important to be aware of the symptoms associated with the menopause, whilst understanding how these symptoms can affect individuals in their work. A better understanding of the subject will lead to fostering a more open culture amongst staff, where individuals will be more comfortable talking about the menopause.

Developing and maintaining an open and positive environment between the service and members of staff can prevent the individuals affected by the menopause from:

- Losing confidence in their skills and ability to do their job;
- Suffering from depression, stress and anxiety;
- Feeling like they need to take time off work, and maybe hide the true reason behind their absence;
- Leaving their job

3.2 Support

It is important that services remove any potential barriers, and create a supportive and open environment so that open communication takes place.

The following should be considered;

- Be aware of the Menopause Guidance;
- Know how to have conversations with staff about the menopause;
- Be aware of the different periods and types of menopause that can affect staff;
- Obtain advice from the Occupational Health Service on how to support staff affected by the menopause, and how changes can be made to assist individuals at work;
- Appreciate that the menopause affects everyone differently, and that the support required may vary from person to person. You will need to ensure that you listen to the individual’s wishes whilst not comparing with others;

- Not to make any assumptions about who the menopause can affect for example; age; ethnicity; disability.
- Signpost to useful menopause resources (see appendix 2).

3.3 Conversations with staff

Any individual conversation with a member of staff affected by the menopause should be strictly confidential and conducted in an environment where they will not be disturbed by others.

If a member of staff would like to chat, the following points may be considered:

- Ensure a safe environment so that the individual feels comfortable;
- Listen to the individual's wishes;
- Ask general questions, but allow the individual to shape the conversation;
- Make no assumptions about the person's symptoms;
- Discuss ways that they can be supported, depending on what they have revealed;
- Agree on actions, and how to implement them;
- Consider if a risk assessment needs to be completed to ensure all factors have been considered and any changes clearly identified.

It is important that the conversations held with staff regarding the menopause are conducted in the strictest confidence, and no information is to be disclosed to another member of staff without the individual's consent.

If the individual wishes the information to be shared, there will be a need to ensure that it is clear what information will be disclosed and to whom. It is recommended that a record of what is agreed is kept.

It is important to respect that individuals may feel uncomfortable discussing the menopause. This can be true for members of staff who are transgender/non-binary who may not have disclosed their status, thus making them reluctant to discuss their menopausal symptoms.

3.4 General Roles and Responsibilities

It is recognised that everyone who works for the council has a role to play in ensuring a comfortable working environment for all staff, including staff experiencing the menopause.

Staff
• Take personal responsibility for their health, well-being and safety
• Should they require support or adaptations at work, they need to be open and honest in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health;
• Contribute to a respectful, healthy and productive working environment;
Managers
• Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Guidance;
• Be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance

• Be ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally; consider a reasonable adjustment if practicable.
• Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
• Seek further advice from Occupational Health if necessary
Occupational Health
• Provide support and advice to staff and Line Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments, if required;
• Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice
Human Resources
• Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of guidance.

Appendix 1

Symptoms and Support

It may be agreed that changes are implemented to assist a member of staff affected by the menopause. Symptoms can be physical and/or psychologically, and potential suggestions for support that may be helpful are set out below. The following is not a comprehensive list.

Possible Symptoms:	**Actions for Consideration:**
Hot Flushes	Easy access to drinking water. A method of temperature control for their work area; - providing a fan; - moving away from a heat source; - open a window/door; - ensure that the windows have blinds - ensuring that it is possible to regulate the temperature in rooms by turning down radiators (as long as the temperature does not drop below 18 degrees Celsius, this will be comfortable for all occupants). Access to the rest room for a break (if applicable, consideration may need to be given to ensure that another member of staff can step in to assist with this).
Light/Heavy Periods	Access to bathroom/toilet facilities (if applicable, consideration may need to be given to ensure that another member of staff can step in to assist with this); Consider suitable storage space for sanitary products and clean clothes.
Headaches	Easy access to drinking water. Close doors to reduce noise, when appropriate. Take a short break to take medication, if needed. Check if workplace temperature is suitable and air quality is good. Check if natural daylight is present in the room, as well as try to reduce artificial light.

Difficulty Sleeping	Consider working flexibly where working arrangements enable.
Feeling Low ***Anxiety*** ***Panic attacks***	Provision of counselling services by Medra/Occupational Health. Allow flexibility, where possible, to take short breaks from other people, when required. Schedule sessions to have a chat with a colleague/manager, when appropriate. Hold regular Personal Development Discussions; and regular contact with line manager/colleagues.
Poor Concentration	Adjust the working pattern appropriately, where service demands enable, if at any particular time of day when concentration is better or worse. Review the tasks and workload allocated. Provide a book, operating boards, or other equipment to aid memory. Where possible, reduce interventions.
General	Considering requests for changes to working arrangements, eg temporary part-time working, swift permission for absence to attend menopause-related medical appointments. Adjusting workplace procedures and processes to support and avoid any detriment to menopausal individuals.

If they have been seeing/or being supported by their GP, it may be useful at this point to refer them to Occupational Health, so that they can provide specialist workplace advice.

Long Term Arrangements

Over time, it may be necessary to consider that members of staff affected by the menopause apply to work flexibly on a permanent basis. If you need further guidance regarding this please contact the Human Resources Team.

Appendix 2

Menopause Resources

Websites

My Menopause Doctor, Louise Newson
https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk/

NHS Menopause Advice
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/

Daisy Network – Advice on Early Menopause
https://www.daisynetwork.org/

Meg's Menopause
https://megsmenopause.com/

Menopause Matters
https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/

Health and Her
https://healthandher.com/

Balance
https://www.balance-menopause.com

Menopause Symptoms
https://www.menopausenow.com/symptoms

Validated Menopause Symptom Questionnaires (useful to begin conversations with you GP) Greene Climacteric Scale
https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/greenescore.php

Menopause Specific Quality of Life Questionnaire
https://www.menopause.org/docs/default-documentlibrary/uqol.pdf?sfvrsn=ae91953a_2

Organisations
British Menopause Society (https://thebms.org.uk/)