



## Corporate Menopause Policy Local Government Employees

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## 1. Aim & Scope

This policy applies to local government staff who are employed by East Renfrewshire Council.

East Renfrewshire Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

East Renfrewshire Council recognises that employees experiencing the menopause may need additional consideration, support and adjustments. East Renfrewshire Council is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports workers experiencing the menopause in order for them to feel confident to: raise issues about their symptoms and; ask for temporary reasonable adjustments at work to help to mitigate any symptoms experienced as a result of the menopause.

## 2. Purpose

- To instil confidence in line managers in managing and supporting colleagues with menopausal symptoms.
- Understand and reduce the barriers that could potentially prevent a colleague, going through the menopause transition, from performing and/or developing to their full potential.
- Identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support team members and help them thrive at work.
- Foster an inclusive working environment in which everyone is treated fairly.
- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner.
- Raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the menopause.
- Outline support and reasonable adjustments available.
- Help us recruit and retain employees experiencing the menopause.

## 3. What is the Menopause?

The menopause is a natural stage of life when an individual's oestrogen levels decline and menstrual periods stop. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

## 4. When does the Menopause Happen?

The menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when hormone balance starts to change. For some individuals, this can start as early their twenties or as late as their late forties.

The average age to undergo the menopause in the UK is 51, but around 1 in 100 experience it before the age of 40. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), or 'premature menopause'. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can also be as a result of surgery (for example hysterectomy, ovariectomy (oophorectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy).

## 5. What are the Symptoms of the Menopause?

The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. Most people will experience symptoms, but everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees.

Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for individuals as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

Some of the most typical symptoms of the menopause include:

Psychological issues such as:

- Mood disturbances
- Anxiety and/or depression
- Memory loss, panic attacks
- Loss of confidence
- Reduced concentration

Physical issues such as:

- Hot flashes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- Sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- Night sweats (hot flashes that happen during the night)
- Irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)

## 6. Why is the Menopause a Workplace Issue?

Around 20% of our workforce identify as a woman and are between the ages of 45 and 55. This means that a significant number of employees may be going through the menopause or experiencing perimenopausal symptoms at any time. In addition, between 1% and 10% of individuals experience an early or premature menopause and so may be trying to deal with the same symptoms. A lack of knowledge about the menopause can also result in a misdiagnosis.

Sometimes going through the menopause can be uneventful, but for others it can impact on their working lives, with it becoming increasingly difficult to function effectively at work as a result of their symptoms. This can leave them feeling less confident, more susceptible to fatigue and stress at work. It has also been recognised that certain aspects of work, working conditions and environment may exacerbate menopause symptoms.

Symptoms may also impact on work performance. It is therefore important that we understand, address and manage these issues in order to protect the health and wellbeing of our workforce. Without effective support, employers risk losing key and valuable talent, expertise and experience.

\*As a manager, you have a responsibility to consider and put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, so that individuals experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role. Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the individual concerned, to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing. Additional advice is

contained within the separate Managers Guidance document “How to approach a sensitive conversation”.

Record any specific needs (and agreed adjustments) and review these as required. Symptoms of the menopause can fluctuate over time, so make sure you have regular informal discussions with the person concerned to ensure that the support still meets their needs. Adjustments should always be tailored to an individual’s specific needs. Treat every employee as an individual, because menopause symptoms can vary a lot from person to person. Keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about someone’s condition or how it may be affecting their ability to do their job.

## **7. Equality Act 2010**

If menopause symptoms have a long-term and substantial impact on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, they may be considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Under the Act, an employer will be under a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and to not discriminate against the worker

## **8. Responsibilities**

Line Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring they are aware of their responsibilities within the Menopause Policy;
- Promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees, including the consideration of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on both physical and mental health in the workplace;
- Being aware of and encouraging the use of all Council support mechanisms;
- Support open discussion and communication on the menopause;
- Maintaining a positive and proactive approach to supporting understanding of the menopause;
- Undertaking an impact assessment on any proposed uniform changes;
- Being sensitive and supportive to those experiencing the effects of the menopause and;
- Fairly, consistently and timeously applying procedures to support employees and manage employee absence.

Employees are responsible for:

- Understanding their responsibilities within the Menopause Policy;
- Looking after their general health and wellbeing and seeking medical or other support where necessary;
- Communicating with their line manager, by email if preferred, the support they require as a result of the menopause and where they do not feel able to speak to their line manager to seek assistance and advice from an HR, Health and Safety or a Trade Union representative and;
- Advising their line manager of any symptom which may or does affect their ability to attend work or to undertake the duties of their post.

## 9. What Kind of Adjustments Could Help?

The menopause affects people in different ways, but there are some practical steps line managers can take to support individuals experiencing the menopause at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms.

It is acknowledged that the reasonableness of adjustments will be dependent on: the type of role undertaken and; the environment in which the role is performed. As such the list below contains examples of possible adjustments that managers may be able to consider:

<b>Regular sleep disruption and/or night sweats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider a short term/temporary flexible working arrangement, for example a later start and finish time where possible</li><li>• Support an employee by offering working from home on an ad hoc basis, where possible, or approve short notice annual leave/flexi leave</li></ul>
<b>Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Looking at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan that can be controlled by the employee or move a desk close to a window.</li><li>• Provide easy access to cold drinking water and washrooms where possible.</li><li>• Provide flexibility wherever possible for employees wearing uniform which may exacerbate symptoms – allowing them to remove certain items/layers where possible. In addition, providing additional uniforms in order for them to be able to change during the day where the need arises.</li><li>• Making adjustments to duties – for example, an employee may find hot flushes can be difficult to cope with when undertaking high visibility work such as formal meetings and formal presentation.</li></ul>
<b>Urogenital Problems</b>
This will include an increased frequency and urgency to pass urine, with a need to access toilet facilities more frequently and to drink more fluids.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing ready access to suitable toilet facilities</li><li>• Providing ready access to suitable washing facilities.</li><li>• Allowing more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.</li><li>• Providing easy access to drinking water.</li></ul>
<b>Heavy or irregular periods</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities.</li><li>• Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.</li><li>• Allow someone to temporarily work from home if they have very heavy bleeding.</li><li>• Make sanitary products available in washrooms.</li><li>• Making it easy to request extra uniforms if needed.</li><li>• Provide a quiet area to work.</li><li>• Provide access to a rest room.</li></ul>
<b>Psychological Problems</b>
A lack of confidence, forgetfulness and/or memory loss, difficulty in concentrating and a change of mood is reported by many people going through the menopause. This can mean that it may become more difficult to carry out certain tasks temporarily and that performance is affected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the office or work area.</li><li>• Promote relaxation or mindfulness activities.</li><li>• Provide access to a quiet space to work or the opportunity to work from home.</li><li>• Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.</li><li>• Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven't already.</li></ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing access to PAM assist our employee assistance counselling service.</li> </ul>          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing any work related stress through a stress risk assessment, as appropriate.</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Psychosocial and Social Impact</b>  |
| Some people report feelings of isolation.  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting physical and mental wellbeing at work.</li> </ul>                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing access to the employee counselling service.</li> </ul>                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing an ability to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues.</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Skin changes</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging employees to wear clothes made from natural fibres.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing comfortable working conditions.</li> </ul>                       |

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| <b>Muscular Aches and Bone and Joint Pain</b>  |
| For individuals experiencing these symptoms, moving and handling or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable.  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments, as appropriate, and work schedules.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting physical wellbeing activities for employee e.g. yoga, pilates.</li> </ul>   |

This is not a definitive list of measures. Managers should actively listen to employees experiencing menopausal symptoms to identify reasonable adjustments to support them at work.

A risk assessment may be undertaken to consider the specific individual needs of a menopausal employee. Further guidance on risk assessments is contained within the Manager's Guidance.

## 10. Appendix: Supplementary Information

### Glossary

- Menopause is defined as a biological stage that occurs when an individual stops menstruating, and reaches the end of their natural reproductive life. The menopause is sometimes known as the 'change of life' and it is defined as having occurred when an individual has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for individuals reaching menopause naturally). The average age for an individual to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons. As a result of these hormonal changes, many individuals experience both physical and emotional symptoms.
- Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when an individual may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.
- Post-menopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when an individual has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

If you would like further information about the menopause, you may wish to look at the following websites, using the links provided below.

- NHS Menopause Guidance provides an overview, together with information about menopausal symptoms and treatment options– [www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/)
- British Menopause Society (BMS) provides education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of reproductive health – <https://thebms.org.uk>
- The Daisy Network Charity, a registered charity providing free information and support to women with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) also known as Premature Menopause – [www.daisynetwork.org.uk](http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk)
- Faculty of Occupational Medicine – [www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause](http://www.fom.ac.uk/health-at-work-2/information-for-employers/dealing-with-health-problems-in-the-workplace/advice-on-the-menopause)
- Henpicked, menopause in the Workplace – <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk>
- The Menopause Café, eat cake, drink tea and discuss the menopause – [www.menopausecafe.net](http://www.menopausecafe.net)
- Talking Menopause, offering tailored workshops and programmes supporting menopause at work for all employees – [www.talkingmenopause.co.uk](http://www.talkingmenopause.co.uk)
- The Menopause Exchange – [www.menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk)
- Menopause Matters, an independent website which gives up-to-date information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options– [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)
- Menopause Support – <https://menopausesupport.co.uk/>
- Meg's Menopause, menopause and women's health advice – <https://megsmenopause.com/menopause/>
- Women's Health Concern (WHC) WHC is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society and provides factsheets about the menopause, linked articles (e.g. about experiencing a healthy menopause), FAQs and recommended further reading - <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/>
- Manage My Menopause, a not for profit organisation providing tailored menopausal advice about post reproductive health - <https://www.managemymenopause.co.uk>
- Women's Experience of Working through the Menopause, December 2010 British Occupational Health Research Foundation. A report of research commissioned by the British Occupational Health Research Foundation, to explore women's experience of working through the menopause -



[http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Womens\\_Experience\\_of\\_Working\\_through\\_the\\_Menopause-Dec\\_2010.pdf](http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Womens_Experience_of_Working_through_the_Menopause-Dec_2010.pdf)

- Simply Hormones provides blogs and articles about the menopause and opportunity to sign up to receive free Menopause Survival Kit, newsletters and updates - <https://simplyhormones.com>
- Royal College of Nursing guidance on the menopause - <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/womens-health/menopause>
- UNISON guidance on the menopause - <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/women/key-issues/menopause/>
- 2017 Government report - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation>
- NICE Guidelines - <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>