

Menopause Policy and Guidance

Corporate Human Resources
Date

Approved Date	
Review Date	
Related legislation/ Applicable Section of Legislation	
Replaces	
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Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Purpose	4
3. Scope	4
4. Aims and Objectives	4-5
5. Right to Privacy	5
6. Definitions	5
7. Symptoms	5-6
8. Roles and Responsibilities	6-7
9. Training and Communication	7
10. Additional support	7
11. Review	7
12. Links to other policies	7
13. Links to other legislation	7-8

Appendices

Appendix 1- Guidance for colleague discussions	9
Appendix 2- Symptoms support	10-11
Appendix 3- Confidential discussion and agreed action template	12-13
Appendix 4- useful contact numbers and external links	14-15
Appendix 5- Personal Menopause Assessment	16-17

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all.

1.2 The menopause is a natural part of a woman's life and it is not always an easy transition. For some women, this can be a long process and can have a long-term impact on their physical and mental health. Providing the right support can help ease the transition. Whilst not every woman experiences symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

1.3 For many women, the onset of the menopause often comes at a time of competing demands e.g. they may need to take on the added responsibility of caring for elderly parents or relatives. This can have a detrimental impact on emotional wellbeing and lead to increased levels of stress.

1.4 The council is committed to raising awareness of what the menopause is, and creating an environment where staff feel free to openly talk about the menopause, without embarrassment.

1.5 This policy sets out the guidelines for staff and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

1.6 It is important that employers are aware that menopause can affect women in different ways and consideration should be given to the specific issues that may impact on older women, younger women, disabled women, women in same sex relationships, transgender and non-binary people as well as Black, Asian and minority ethnic women.

2.0 Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the council supports employees who are affected by the symptoms of the menopause to enable them to continue working.

3.0 Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all Council employees. The council will also take all reasonable steps to support all agency assignees who are placed in Belfast City Council.

4.0 Aims and Objectives

4.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- break the stigma surrounding the menopause
- ensure increased awareness of menopause issues among employees and managers
- outline how employees can be supported by their managers

4.2 The objectives of the policy are to:

- set out what employees need to do if they are experiencing menopause symptoms that are impacting on their health, wellbeing and work
- provide guidance on facilitating conversations between managers and staff about menopause related symptoms impacting and what managers can do to provide the necessary support
- create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work, if necessary,
- promote a greater understanding of the menopause and how employees are affected

5.0 Right to Privacy

5.1 The council respects an employee's right to keep private the fact that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms.

6.0 Definitions

6.1 Menopause

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be much earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

6.2 Perimenopause

Perimenopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before the menopause.

6.3 Post menopause

Post menopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

6.4 Medical or surgical menopause

Medical or surgical menopause can occur suddenly at any age when ovaries are damaged by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery or through induced menopause due to conditions such as endometriosis or having a hysterectomy.

6.5 Premature menopause

Premature menopause is estimated by the NHS to happen to 1 in 100 women before they reach the age of 40. In some cases, it can happen to women in their teens and twenties. In many cases there is no clear cause of premature menopause.

7.0 Symptoms

7.1 It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom or need help or support.

7.2 Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically. Women may experience only some or all of these symptoms (the list is not exhaustive)

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- sleep disturbance
- insomnia
- fatigue/tiredness
- poor concentration
- reduced confidence
- poor memory
- brain fog*
- headache
- palpitations
- joint pains
- skin irritation
- dry eyes
- urinary problems
- hair loss
- loss of libido
- menopause related mood disturbance e.g. low mood, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, irritability, mood swings
- dizziness
- weight gain

*Brain fog involves a feeling of confusion and disorientation. It can make a person feel as if the processes of thinking, understanding and remembering are not working as they should. It can affect memory, including the ability to store and recall information, as well as the use and understanding of language.

Some potential areas of support can be found in Appendix 2.

8.0 Roles and responsibilities

8.1 General employee responsibilities

8.1.1 All council employees have a responsibility to:

- take personal responsibility to look after their health
- be open and honest with their managers/HR or Occupational Health if they are struggling with menopausal symptoms and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their job
- contribute to a respectful and productive working environment
- be willing to help and support their colleagues
- understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving because of menopausal symptoms
- report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause

8.2 Line Manager responsibilities

8.2.1 All council managers have a responsibility to:

- familiarise themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance

- be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- use the guidance in Appendices 1 and 2, to support the conversation
- use Appendix 3 to record the discussion, including reasonable adjustments agreed and actions to be implemented
- ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates
- explore any reasonable adjustment that can be implemented and ensure any agreed adjustments are adhered to

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:

- liaise with Human Resources who may recommend a referral to Occupational Health
- review Occupational Health advice and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical
- update the action plan accordingly and continue to review

9.0 Training and communication

9.1 The council will support implementation of this policy with a programme of awareness raising and training for both managers, staff and trade union representatives .

10.0 Additional support

10.1 In addition to line manager support, the council will make support available through Occupational Health, the council's confidential employee counselling service and some health and wellbeing activity will have a focus on menopause support.

Employees can also seek support via the Council's Women's Network Group, details of which can be found on Interlink

11.0 Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed as required by the council and, if necessary, revised in consultation with recognised Trade Unions in light of changing legislation and current good practice. Details of the next scheduled review are noted on the front cover of this policy.

12.0 Links to other policies

This policy is linked to:

- Attendance Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan
- Work Life Balance Policy

13.0 Links to other legislation

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, NI Regulation 3(1);
- Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 as amended;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended;
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999;
- Employment Equality Age Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

Appendix 1- Guidance for manager discussions

These guidance notes are intended to assist managers when dealing with the sensitive and personal issue of the menopause. We recognise that every person is different, and each case should be dealt with individually.

It is important for managers to offer supportive conversations with staff to enable them to manage their wellbeing and capacity at work. These conversations should allow them to discuss their menopausal symptoms to agree possible solutions and actions.

Support should also be available for male employees who wish to speak about a family member.

Departmental Human Resources will be available to help and advise managers and employees if that is what the individual wants.

If a member of staff wishes to speak to you about their menopausal symptoms, please ensure that you:

- allow adequate time to have the discussion
- find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality
- encourage them to speak openly and honestly, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally as it can be daunting or embarrassing for a woman to openly discuss their issues
- jointly discuss symptoms, potential solutions and ways in which the employee can be supported and any adjustments required (see Appendix 2)
- agree actions and how to implement them (use Appendix 3 to record the meeting), so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends.
- ensure that this record is treated as confidential and stored securely in their personnel file and let them know how you intend to store the information
- maintain confidentiality and seek consent to share information with others, if necessary
- ensure ongoing dialogue is maintained and review dates are agreed to review the symptoms and actions to ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to

If an employee does not want to speak with you about their menopause experience, you should consider offering the support of another manager with whom they may feel more comfortable discussing menopause issues. An employee may also wish to seek the advice of their trade union.

Appendix 2- Symptom support

Menopausal symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically. Some potential areas of support for staff to be considered if reasonable and practicable in the circumstances include:

Factors to consider	Potential actions for consideration
Hot flushes/ heavy periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider any alterations that can be offered regarding uniform e.g. removal of layers, thermally comfortable fabric (use of natural fibres, where possible) • facilitate a comfortable working temperature • consider availability of desk fans • review of office seating plans so that affected employees can be near the window or open doors, or away from direct sources of heat such as radiators, fitting blinds to windows • access to a quiet area if needed to manage a severe flush • ensure easy access to fresh drinking water • access to adequate changing/ washing facilities for staff to change their clothes during the working day
Low mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask permission • offer a quiet space to go to 'clear the head' • signpost to other services e.g. employee counselling
Loss of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure there are regular 1-1s and PDP discussions to ensure constructive feedback and that any development needs are identified and addressed • ensure regular time and sufficient time with manager to discuss any issues • where necessary, agree time to catch up with work
Poor concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss if there are any times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/ practice accordingly • review tasks and allocation of workload • offer a quiet space to work • offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices • have agreements in place in an open plan office that an individual is having 'protected time' so that they are not disturbed
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signpost to employee counselling services/ occupational health • be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggest mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, going for a walk
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to fresh drinking water • offer a quiet space to work • offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices • have time out to take medication if needed • encourage regular breaks and walks in fresh air
Difficulty sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider flexible working options, particularly if suffering from lack of sleep
Support available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggest consultation with their GP regarding specific symptom management or any symptoms related concerns • if they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace • promote in-house mindfulness sessions and other available health and wellbeing activity with a focus on menopause support • BCC Women's Network Group - Menopause Support Network

Nutrition, lifestyle and the menopause

Hormonal changes at the time of the menopause can affect the nutritional health of women. Women at this stage of life may experience menopausal symptoms which can be helped by diet and lifestyle changes. There is also an increased risk of heart disease, osteoporosis and weight gain.

Eating a well-balanced and varied diet combined with being physically active (including strengthening exercises) can help ease menopausal symptoms as well as promoting heart and bone health and a healthy weight.

Below are links to some useful resources which give evidence-based diet and lifestyle advice to help reduce symptoms and keep women as healthy as possible before, during and after menopause.

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/menopause-diet.html>

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/lifestages/menopause.html>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829884/3-physical-activity-for-adults-and-older-adults.pdf

[Menopause - Treatment - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/528193/Eatwell_guide_colour.pdf

Appendix 3- Confidential discussion and agreed actions template

Employee details:

Name: _____ **Department:** _____

Job title: _____ **Location:** _____

Factors discussed: including symptoms experienced (physical and psychological)	Impact of symptoms experienced including effect on work (if any)	Agreed actions/ adjustments	Date of review

Signed (staff member):_____

Signed (Manager):_____

Date:_____

Appendix 4- Useful contact numbers and external links

Employee Counselling- Employees can self-refer to this service –

Telephone 028 9051 7269 or 07921501299

Occupational Health- Referral to this service is through your line manager

Information on the menopause can be found on the Healthwise section of Health and Wellbeing Support area on Interlink - <http://ohrd.net/health-wise/a-to-z-health-conditions/>

NHS guidance on menopause – www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/

British Menopause Society - www.thebms.org.uk

British Menopause Society factsheets on CBT

<https://thebms.org.uk/2017/02/new-factsheets-cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms/>

Menopause information. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>.

Relate- The menopause is affecting our relationship, how do I talk to my partner? <https://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-relationships/feeling-unsatisfied-your-relationship/menopause-affecting-our-relationship-how-do-i-talk-my-partner?>

Chartered Institution of Personnel Development (CIPD) –

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide-for-people-managers_tcm18-55548.pdf

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>.

Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>.

Henpicked. This website provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories. See <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>

Business in the Community- The Menopause and Me Digital Toolkit <https://www.bitcni.org.uk/programmes/the-menopause-me-digital-toolkit/>

[Transgender and The Menopause - MegsMenopause](#)

[The Menopause Charity - Menopause Facts, Advice and Support](#)

Appendix 5- Personal Menopause Assessment (optional)

Personal Menopause Assessment *(optional)*

Below is a list of some of the key symptoms that you may experience during the menopause and which may hinder your ability to fulfil your day to day duties. The below list is not exhaustive, but may help you consider what symptoms you are suffering and what you feel may assist you to undertake your role. NB You do not need to share this with your line manager unless you wish to do so.

Symptom	Location you have the symptom (if both tick both)		Severity of the symptom				How frequently do you experience the symptom					
	Home	Work	Mild	Moderate	Intense	Severe	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Hourly	Constant
<i>Hot flushes</i>												
<i>Night sweats</i>												
<i>Irregular periods</i>												
<i>Mood swings</i>												
<i>Fatigue</i>												
<i>Hair loss</i>												
<i>Sleep disorders</i>												
<i>Difficulty concentrating</i>												
<i>Memory lapses</i>												
<i>Dizziness</i>												
<i>Weight gain</i>												
<i>Incontinence</i>												
<i>Bloating</i>												
<i>Allergies</i>												
<i>Brittle nails</i>												

<i>Changes in odour</i>												
<i>Irregular heartbeat</i>												
<i>Depression</i>												
<i>Anxiety</i>												
<i>Irritability</i>												
<i>Panic Disorder/attacks</i>												
<i>Breast pain</i>												
<i>Headache</i>												
<i>Joint pain</i>												
<i>Burning tongue</i>												
<i>Electric shocks</i>												
<i>Digestive problems</i>												
<i>Gum problems</i>												
<i>Muscle tension</i>												
<i>Itchy skin</i>												
<i>Tingling extremities</i>												
<i>Osteoporosis</i>												
<i>Other:</i>												