

Churchill Parish Council

MENOPAUSE POLICY

AIMS OF THE POLICY

Churchill Parish Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here. The Council recognises that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments.

The Council recognises that the menopausal symptoms can also affect transgender people and nonbinary people. The 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 reasonable adjustments at work.

The aim of the policy is to:

- make Councillors aware of their responsibility to understand how the menopause can affect staff, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work;
- 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;
- enable workers experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs;
- outline support and reasonable adjustments available;
- help us recruit and retain employees experiencing the menopause.

This policy is part of the Council's commitment to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of all the workforce and will ensure the workplace does not make the menopausal symptoms of employees worse. This policy is part of the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. We are committed to creating a workplace that respects and values each other's differences, that promotes dignity and combats prejudice, discrimination and harassment. This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of the Council as an employer of choice. The Council recognises that many of the changes to workplace culture and adjustments offered here may not only be of benefit to workers experiencing the menopause, but to all staff.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to all staff who are employed by the Council. This policy is supported by and developed in accordance with the trade unions.

DEFINITION OF THE MENOPAUSE

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. For some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in the hormones, and the woman stops having periods. Women may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing the menopause and perimenopause and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms.

Each woman will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

Disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

The Council recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. Menopausal symptoms may include:

- hot flushes – a very common symptom that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate;
- heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted, as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic;
- night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance;
- low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems;
- urinary problems - more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal;
- irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also, vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort;
- joint and muscle aches and stiffness;
- weight gain;
- headaches and migraines;
- menopausal hair loss;
- osteoporosis - the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis;
- side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that those affected may already be finding difficult to manage at work.

SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

The Council is committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and will take positive action to support staff experiencing the menopause.

All staff will be provided with appropriate information and training so that they are able to better understand the effects of the menopause and be comfortable about discussing and addressing the impact that it can have on employees in carrying out their roles. All staff training will be supported by awareness campaigns aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture. All policies and procedures should take account of the effects of the menopausal symptoms to ensure that employees experiencing the menopause are not disadvantaged as a result of their symptoms.

The Council recognises that some employees experiencing the menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing, and we aim to provide as much support as is reasonably practicable for individuals. The Council recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels, and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let their line manager or an alternative contact know if they experience symptoms that may impact on their work, so that appropriate support is provided. Such information will be treated confidentially and in accordance with the Council's data protection policy. If employees experiencing the menopause are not comfortable discussing their problems with their line manager, they can discuss it with another person.

Employees may also prefer to discuss their problems with an alternative manager, Occupational Health and/or a trade union representative. Councillors should make allowances should there be an additional need for sickness absence by employees experiencing the menopause in order to manage their menopausal symptoms. Absence will be recorded as related to menopausal symptoms and managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers.

The Council recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures. The Council will ensure that gender sensitive risk assessments are undertaken to consider the specific needs of employees experiencing the menopause and to ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse.

The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments that may be required.

Common areas in particular to consider are:

- workplace temperature and ventilation;
- access to adequate toilet and washing facilities;
- access to drinking water;
- uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE);
- working times and break times;
- workplace stress and workload;
- bullying and harassment.

Employees who are experiencing the menopause can apply for the following adjustments to support them at work:

- control over environmental factors – with provision of desk fans on request, 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, greater access to chilled drinking water, and to toilets and washing facilities;
- where uniforms are provided, to use natural fibres wherever possible;
- flexibility over uniform and dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, and provision of additional spare uniforms;
- changing/washing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day;
- for employees who are required to drive as part of their usual work pattern, duration of travel to be reduced and increased rest breaks provided;
- flexible working arrangements including options for flexitime (to work around symptoms or adjusting start and finish times for example), shift-swapping, and homeworking where appropriate;
- flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day, and if required providing cover as necessary for these breaks;
- flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments;
- temporary changes to the employee's duties, such as undertaking fewer high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings or on reception because it can be difficult to cope with symptoms such as hot flushes or assessing how work is allocated or whether the employee is affected at particular points of the day.
- provision of private spaces for women to rest temporarily, to talk with a colleague or to phone for personal or professional support.

This is not a definitive list of adjustments. The Council will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff and union representatives.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS

Councillors should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities. Councillors with the support of the Staffing Committee should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues.

Councillors should be ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treat the discussion sensitively, confidentially and professionally.

Councillors will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing the menopause and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner.

All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up any support available to employees experiencing the menopause. The Council will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

All requests for support or adjustments must be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the data protection policy. Councillors will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEES

All staff should take a personal responsibility to look after their health.

Employees are encouraged to inform the Staffing Committee if they are experiencing menopausal symptoms that may impact on their work and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their jobs.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to seek support through their GP, and other external organisations.

All staff have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful and productive working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause. If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to the menopause, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

GLOSSARY

Menopause – a natural transition stage in most women's lives lasting from four to eight years, although for some women it can be much longer. Most women experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

Premature menopause – for some women, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called premature ovarian insufficiency. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause.

Medical or surgical menopause – there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the woman's age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when a woman's ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Perimenopause – a period of time before the menopause, in the years leading up to the menopause where there can be significant changes for women, including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Post-menopause – a term used when a woman's periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Some significant symptoms that can impact on work may continue for years.

Disabled person – under the Equality Act, a disabled person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In some cases, menopausal symptoms may meet the definition of 'impairment'. The menopause is a workplace issue: guidance and model policy

SELF-MANAGEMENT FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING THE MENOPAUSE

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence.

Consider:

- seeking medical advice from your GP;
- discussing symptoms with your manager or with the alternative contact (see above) and with your trade union rep and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments;

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight;
- drinking plenty of water;
- exercising regularly – to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels;
- not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke;
- ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes;
- having access to natural light;
- staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats;
- ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi);
- trying vaginal lubricant or moisturiser – available from shops and pharmacies for anyone experiencing vaginal dryness.