Great Aycliffe Town Council

MENOPAUSE POLICY

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MENOPAUSE POLICY

Introduction

1 The Menopause is legally recognised in the workplace under the Employment Rights Act 2025, in a broader effort to address the needs of the rapidly growing demographic of women aged over 45 in the workplace.

2 Great Aycliffe Town Council is committed to being a good employer and recognises that menopause symptoms affect people differently. The Council therefore strives to ensure that employees are supported through every stage of menopause and to meet individual needs within the workforce in order to support them to carry out their job effectively and maintain high standards of service delivery and attendance.

3 The Council is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in employment by treating the diverse range of employees in a fair and equitable manner and that we do not unfairly discriminate against any new or existing employee.

4 A menopause policy has benefits for employers and employees, as well as responsibilities, such as:

- Fair treatment in all aspects of menopause symptoms in the workplace.
- Employee retention, enhanced productivity, an inclusive workplace and legal and ethical compliance through employee's being given the right support.

5 This policy does not give contractual rights to individual employees. The Council reserves the right to alter any of its terms at any time although employees will be notified in writing of any changes.

6 The Council's commitment under this Menopause Policy is to:

- Ensure that menopause support is fair and consistent.
- Engage in regular conversations with employees about their needs.
- Treat menopause as a health and wellbeing issue with legal implications.
- Focus on supporting the individual and recognise different experiences.
- Train all Managers in recognising menopause symptoms and handling conversations sensitively and confidentially.
- Ensure employees can access support without having to disclose sensitive information to Managers unless they choose to do so.
- Ensure employees know how to access support in the workplace.
- Consider reasonable adjustments to support to those experiencing menopause symptoms, promoting dignity and retention of valued employees.
- Provide an inclusive, supportive working environment for all employees.

Who does the policy apply to?

7 This policy covers all employees and the principles set out in the policy apply:

- In the workplace
- Outside of the workplace in a work-related context.

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Monitoring Procedures

8 The Menopause Policy and associated procedures will be regularly reviewed.

Menopause stages

Perimenopause

9 The transitional phase leading up to menopause is called perimenopause, during which hormonal levels start to fluctuate and symptoms may begin to manifest.

10 It can last for several years (typically 3-5 years) before menopause occurs.

Menopause

11 The time when a woman has not had a menstrual period for 12 consecutive months due to lower hormone levels, marking the end of her reproductive years.

12 It usually affects women between the age of 45 and 55, but can happen earlier and the effects can continue much later. It affects anyone who has periods and the severity of symptoms varies from mild and manageable to more severe and can create difficulties at work affecting concentration, confidence and performance.

Postmenopause

13 Postmenopause refers to the stage in a woman's life after she has not had a menstrual period for 12 consecutive months. This phase lasts for the rest of a woman's life and is characterised by lower levels of estrogen and progesterone, leading to various physical and emotional changes.

Male menopause

14 Is the gradual decline of testosterone in aging men and typically starts around age 30-40 and becomes more noticeable after age 50. Unlike female menopause, male hormone decline is gradual at a slow decrease. Many men remain within the normal hormonal range into old age. Not all men experience symptoms and the severity varies widely.

Endometriosis and other uterine related illnesses

15 Although endometriosis and other uterine related illnesses are not directly related to menopause, they can cause significant pain and other physical symptoms. Employees experiencing these symptoms may also require appropriate workplace support and adjustments.

Disabled women and pre-existing health conditions

16 Women with a disability or pre-existing health condition may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can also be made worse by existing conditions.

Menopause symptoms

17 Menopausal symptoms vary widely, but some commons symptoms are:

- 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

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- 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).

Menopause Discussions and Meetings

18 Managers should be aware of their responsibility to understand how menopause can affect staff, promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues and remain open to having regular conversations with staff suffering with menopause symptoms, listen to their concerns and try to resolve any issues at the earliest stage.

19 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. All discussions should remain confidential in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

20 Managers should be mindful that some employees may be open about their symptoms and others may not want to discuss sensitive details. Some allowances should be made when supporting employees through menopause sensitively, as everyone's experience will be different so communication is important in order to understand each individuals symptoms and needs. Managers will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

21 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.

Equality

22 Whilst not considered a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, employees should not be put at a disadvantage or treated less favourably due to their menopause symptoms. This could be considered discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, for example: age, disability, gender or gender reassignment.

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23 In some cases, menopause could be considered a disability under discrimination law. Managers should focus on supporting the employee rather than whether their condition is considered a disability.

24 Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and Managers should be mindful that anyone who has periods can suffer from menopause symptoms.

25 Menopause can also have an impact on those supporting someone going through menopause, for example a relative, partner, colleague or carer.

26 If someone is treated less favourably or put at a disadvantage because of their sex, it should be acted upon promptly and be considered as direct or indirect discrimination.

27 Managers should be aware that unwanted behaviour or comments about someone's menopause symptoms could count as harassment or sexual harassment, depending on the nature of the behaviour, and should be managed with the harassment policy.

28 Although menopause will only be experienced by women and other people who have a menstrual cycle, men should also be included in conversations and training. This is because they might be supporting others going through it.

Risk Assessments

29 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.

30 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.

Managers' Responsibilities

31 All Line Managers are responsible for the day to day welfare of their staff and are expected to monitor and manage the performance and wellbeing of their staff, which includes managing any concerns from the employer or employee regarding menopause symptoms.

32 The Town Clerk and Service Managers will be responsible for ensuring this policy is adhered to, and the Corporate and Policy Officer will ensure appropriate training is provided to Managers.

Employees' Responsibilities

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

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34 Employees are encouraged to inform their Manager 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.

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

36 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 they are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

37 Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause.

38 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.

Reasonable Adjustments

39 Managers will consider reasonable adjustments tailored to employees' menopause symptoms to provide a supportive work environment.

40 Absences relating to menopause symptoms should be recorded as such and managers will consider such absences as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in policy triggers.

41 The Council recognises the potential impact on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures.

42 A number of reasonable adjustments may be considered to assist and support employees experiencing menopause symptoms at work, for example:

- 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.
- Flexible working arrangements to work around symptoms or adjusting start and finish times for example, shift-swapping, or 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 less 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 if 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.

43 This is not a definitive list of adjustments. The Council will consider additional reasonable suggestions put forward by employees.

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