



# ECCLESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

*Serving your Community Since 1894*

## **MENOPAUSE POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

Ecclesfield Parish Council ('The Parish Council') is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here.

The Council recognises that female employees may need support during the menopause, particularly as the menopause is not a widely discussed subject and can be misunderstood.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer from symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men should be aware too.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.

Some women may find it difficult to discuss the menopause and may feel that they need to take time off work to deal with their symptoms without disclosing the reason. This policy and procedures aim to raise awareness about the menopause amongst employees and provide additional guidance to enable employees to understand more about the menopause.

Alongside this policy, the Council will offer support and guidance for employees and Councillors so that they can 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. This will be supported by awareness campaigns also aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture both in the Council and more generally.

The menopause can affect women in different ways. Some experience few or no symptoms, others experience mild to severe symptoms. Recognising these changes can help in making the links between workplace health and safety and the problems some women experience working through the menopause. The effects of the menopause should be considered in any relevant capability performance or issues as it is recognised that the physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause and side effects of hormone replacement therapy may have a detrimental impact on women's work performance.

Menopause is not usually associated with the workplace or with workers' health and safety however it is a protected characteristic of the Equality Act 2010. Although many experience few problems around this time, others have severe problems, and these problems can sometimes arise from the way we work and working conditions.

## **2. Accessing support**

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different levels of support may be needed. As with all longstanding health-related conditions, the Council is aware that sympathetic and appropriate support is required from line management to help women deal with the issues arising from the menopause.

Female employees may feel uncomfortable going to their manager if they are experiencing problems, especially if the manager is male. There are other options available such as approaching the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Staffing Committee, a female Councillor or seeking medical advice.

The Parish Council is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make symptoms worse. Adjustments may be necessary to support women who are experiencing the menopause.

A risk assessment should be undertaken in order to consider the particular requirements of menopausal women and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments which may be required.

Working time arrangements should be flexible enough to ensure they meet the needs of menopausal women, who may at times require access to more flexible working in order to deal with their symptoms, including starting later after difficulties sleeping, needing to leave work suddenly or taking more breaks during the day.

Consideration should be given to environmental factors. Issues that have been highlighted as useful among the general working population include temperature and ventilation controls, such as the use of fans. Office seating plans could also be reviewed to enable the employee to sit near the window in order for the employee to adjust the temperature of the room accordingly.

Consideration should be given regarding access to chilled drinking water and access to adequate workplace sanitary facilities. Uniforms may exacerbate symptoms in terms of hot flushes and sweating therefore flexibility may be required to enable employees to cope with these symptoms.

Adjustments may be required to the employee's duties as hot flushes can be more difficult to cope with when undertaking high visibility work such as formal presentations and formal meetings for example.

### 3. Self Health

Current health promotion advice to women highlights the importance of lifestyle choices before during and after the menopause and the benefits of:

- Eating healthily and regularly;
- Wearing natural fibres;
- Exercising regularly to maintain aerobic fitness levels;
- Consulting with their GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to any other causes;
- Contacting Occupational Health about their symptoms in order to obtain advice and support;
- Obtaining support and discussing their symptoms with a trusted manager;
- Drinking plenty of water;
- Not smoking;
- Ensuring alcohol intake is at, or below, recommended levels;
- Having access to natural light; and
- Getting adequate rest and relaxation.

These can help with some symptoms of menopause and may also help reduce the risks of other conditions in later life.

There are two main strands of law that may relate to the perimenopause and menopause:

- The Equality Act 2010 protects workers against discrimination. This includes because of their sex, a disability and their age.
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 says an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure health, safety and welfare at work.

### 4. Definitions

- **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. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons.
- **Peri-menopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman 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 a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

## 5. Symptoms of Menopause

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping.

## 6. Links to Other Policies

This policy is linked to, and in support of, all Parish Council policies and including Health and Safety.

## 7. SOURCES OF FURTHER ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

- **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.** These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG23>
- The **National Health Service** provides an overview of menopause. You can find More information at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>
- **Menopause information.** The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offers further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>.
- **Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)** information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>
- **Menopause Matters.** This is an independent website providing up-to-date information about the menopause <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- **The Daisy Network** (supporting women who experience premature menopause). Further details can be found at [Charity for Women with POI | The Daisy Network](#)
- A **Government Report**, researched by the University of Leicester's School of Business has been published. Read more here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation>

## **Appendix 1 - Managers' Guidance for colleague discussions**

### **Symptoms Support**

The Parish Council recognises that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

All advice is given, and written, in accordance with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) recommendations and best practice.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below) – hand out the Menopause Advice Sheet (Appendix 2).
- Agree actions, and how to implement them, so that all parties agree on what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom.
- Ensure that a designated time is allowed for a follow-up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; support for women should be considered as detailed below:

#### **Hot Flashes**

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source.
- Easy access to drinking water.
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket.
- Have access to a restroom for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

#### **Heavy/light Periods**

- Have permanent access to washroom facilities.
- Request an extra uniform.
- Ensure sanitary products are available in washrooms, in order to obtain personal protection.
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.

#### **Headaches**

- Have ease of 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.

**Difficulty Sleeping**

- Ask to be considered for flexible working, particularly suffering from a lack of sleep.

**Low Mood**

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to outside of the work area.
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head'.

**Loss of Confidence**

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions.
- Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

**Poor Concentration**

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.
- Review task allocation and workload.
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment.
- Offer quiet space to work.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Reduce interruptions.
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

**Anxiety**

- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to outside of work their area.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

**Panic Attacks**

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' outside of the office.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace.

## Appendix 2 - Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they're getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. But, sometimes, that's easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

**Don't wait.** It is all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

**Read the NICE guidelines.** This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

**Prepare for your appointment.** It's easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

**Keep a list of your symptoms,** your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

**Ask the receptionist which doctor** is best to talk to about menopause. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery and can help you find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

**Ask for a longer appointment.** If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

**Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion.** If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

**Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area.** Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

**Take your partner or a friend with you.** The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you.

**What to expect from your doctor**

There are certain things a GP should – and should not – do during your appointment.

**They should:**

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms and your longer-term health;
- Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options;
- Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

**They should not:**

- Tell you that it's just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help;
- Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history;
- Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

**Remember, your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.**

**Approved by Council: June 2024**

**Review Date: June 2026**