

Menstruation to Menopause Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is fully committed to providing an inclusive working environment for every employee.
- 1.2 In this regard, the Council will provide appropriate support to women who are experiencing menstruation and menopause.
- 1.3 In addition, the Council acknowledges that these stages and symptoms can also impact trans and non-binary people.
- 1.4 Menstruation and menopause are natural stages of life and yet it remains a taboo subject in the workplace. This policy demonstrates our commitment to changing the way we think and act about menstruation and menopause in the workplace and will ensure that employees are supported.
- 1.5 Sandwell Council should support employees with menstruation and menopausal symptoms in the same way as they would with any other health condition. The council has a responsibility to create a stigma-free environment that encourages open discussion and disclosure; this will encourage women to not suffer in silence, and discuss the practical steps needed to support their full engagement and productivity at work.
- 1.6 It is important that the Council understands the difficulties and anxieties of employees who are currently going through these stages, and that we manage these issues by raising awareness and providing support for employees.
- 1.7 Studies show that some women felt the menopause had negatively affected their job performance; including believing that it had a negative impact on their managers and colleagues' perceptions of their competence at work.
- 1.8 This policy sets out the expectations for employees and managers on providing the right support to manage menstruation and menopausal symptoms at work and has been developed in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

2. Aims / Objectives

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to educate and inform managers about the potential impact and symptoms of menstruation and menopause, and how they can support employees at work.
- 2.2 To foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menstruation and menopause.
- 2.3 Ensure employees with menstruation and menopausal symptoms feel confident to discuss it and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles.
- 2.4 Take a pro-active stance by promoting a greater understanding of menstruation and menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.
- 2.5 This policy and its supporting guidance will provide direction and clarity on how we will deal with menstruation and menopause related issues, either for individuals experiencing these natural stages of life, or those who are affected indirectly, for example: line managers, partners and colleagues.

3. Scope

- 3.1 The policy applies to all employees of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

4. Definitions

- 4.1 **Menstruation** also known as a 'period', is the process in a woman of discharging blood and other material from the lining of the uterus at monthly intervals from puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy.
- 4.2 **Menopause** is the natural biological process experienced by most women that marks the end of their reproductive life, most typically occurring between age 45 and 55.

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.

Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before the age of 40; this is known as premature menopause.

4.3 **Perimenopause** is the time leading up to the menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or the start of other menopausal symptoms.

4.4 **Postmenopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

5. **Symptoms**

5.1. **Menstruation**

5.2 Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively:

- Abdominal or pelvic cramping
- Lower back pain
- Bloating and sore breasts
- Food cravings
- Mood swings and irritability
- Headache
- Fatigue

5.3 **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.

5.4 Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively:

- Hot flushes
- Poor concentration
- Loss of confidence
- Mood swings and Irritability
- Irregular periods
- Headache
- Brain Fog
- Night sweats
- Fatigue
- Low mood or anxiety
- Sleep disturbance
- Vaginal dryness
- Depression

6. **Roles and Responsibilities**

6.1 All employees are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health;
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers, Human Resources and Occupational Health;
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment;
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues;
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving because of their symptoms.

6.2 All line managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menstruation and Menopause Policy and guidance;
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menstruation and menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally;
- Refer to the guidance before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required;
- Record any adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented;
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
- Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to.

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

- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice;
- Refer the employee to Occupational Health;
- Review the Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical;
- Continue to review.

6.3 The role of Occupational Health is to:

- During an SRS assessment discussion of symptoms and wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research and best practice to assist individuals to determine whether menstruation or menopause may be a contributing factor.
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice;
- Provide support and advice to HR and Line Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments, if required;
- Highlight any increases in referrals due to menstruation and menopausal symptoms
- Deliver Menopause Awareness sessions to managers and staff as requested

6.4 The role of Human Resources is to:

- Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of this Policy and Guidance;
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in respect of related absence levels and performance.

6.5 Employee Assistance and Counselling Service will:

- Provide access to 24/7 telephone counselling and face-to-face counselling for all employees on 0808 168 2143.

7. External Support

- 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/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>
- The National Health Service provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.
- 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/>
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines- Heavy Periods. You can find out more using the following link:
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg44>
- The National Health Service provides an overview of Periods. Yiu can fund more at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/>

8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Managers' Guidance
- Appendix 2 - Menstruation and Menopause Advice Sheet