Menopause Policy

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Introduction and Background

Meriden Parish Council ('The 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.

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51.

The NHS states that around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before they reach 40 years of age. This is known as 'premature menopause' or premature ovarian insufficiency' and this group of women need to have medical intervention.

On average, most symptoms last around four years from the last period. However, around 1 in every 10 women experiences them for up to 12 years. Not all women will have symptoms and for those that do, the symptoms can vary in type, amount and severity.

This policy aims to raise awareness about the menopause amongst employees and Councillors and provide additional guidance to enable employees and Councillors to understand more about the menopause.

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 around the ages of 45-55 (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.

Menopause Symptoms

Most women will experience physical and/or psychological menopausal symptoms. Some of these can be quite severe and have a significant impact on their everyday activities, including work life. It is recognised that the menopause is a very individual experience and that women can be affected in different ways and to different degrees. The following are the most common symptoms:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Sleep disruption
- Headaches, aches and pains
- Skin irritation
- Palpitations

- Low mood or anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Urinary problems
- Clarity of thought impaired
- Fatigue
- Loss of confidence
- Mood swings
- Weight gain and slowed metabolism
- Heavy periods and clots
- Dry eyes

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. Some women may find it difficult to discuss the menopause, without embarrassment.

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 Chair or Vice Chair of Meriden Parish Council or seeking medical advice.

Meriden Parish Council is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make symptoms worse. Adjustment 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, 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 regarding access to chilled drinking water and access to adequate workplace sanitary facilities.

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 meetings for example.

Manager and Employee Responsibilities

Key responsibilities of managers include:

- To be familiar with this policy and be willing to have open, professional and sensitive conversations, ensuring confidentiality, with the employee. Ensure that follow up discussions are conducted.

- To listen to the employee and understand what symptoms they are experiencing. Acknowledge that they may find the menopause difficult to talk about – discuss somewhere in private where its easy to speak openly.
- Consider requests promptly for medical appointments, flexible working, agile working and other workplace adjustments that may be necessary, making decisions in line with the needs of Meriden Parish Council.

Key responsibilities of employees include:

- Employees are encouraged to facilitate a conversation with their line manager if they are experiencing difficulties at work.
- Keep their line manager up to date of any relevant changes in their health which may impact their work.
- Be flexible with their line manager in assessing options and suggesting alternative ways in which responsibilities and tasks could be undertaken, where necessary.
- Seek advice from their GP on available treatment options if symptoms persist or are having a significant adverse effect on their health and wellbeing.

Self Help Measures

Some ways women can help manage their symptoms of the menopause / peri-menopause include:

- Eating healthy and regularly
- Wearing natural fibres. Consider wearing layered clothing so that they can be easily undone/removed
- 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 other causes
- 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
- Getting adequate rest and relaxation