

Witham Town Council: Menopause Policy

This policy sets out the guidelines for member of staff and councillors on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. Witham Town Council is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all employees and councillors experiencing menopause, in line with its duty of care and obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all Witham Town Council staff and councillors. The policy applies to all stages of the menopause: perimenopause, menopause and post menopause. This policy also covers those experiencing menopause as a result of medical or surgical treatment, and recognises that menopause may affect people of different ages and backgrounds, including trans and non-binary colleagues.

Aims of the Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have good conversations, and are clear on the town council's policy and practices.
- Educate and inform staff and councillors about the potential symptoms of menopause and suggest how they can support their colleagues, who may be experiencing symptoms, at work.
- Ensure that colleagues suffering from menopausal symptoms feel confident to discuss it, ask for support and ask for any reasonable adjustments that allow them to continue to be successful in their roles.
- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.
- Assure staff that the town council is a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.
- Comply with the Equality Act 2010 by recognising menopause as a potential disability or health condition requiring reasonable adjustments.
- Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion by supporting all individuals affected by menopause, regardless of gender identity.

Definitions

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a person's life that occurs when they stop menstruating and reach the end of their natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when someone has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for people reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a person to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when a person 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 person has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

For the purposes of this policy, menopause includes natural, surgical, and medically-induced menopause.

Symptoms of Menopause

It is important to note that not every person will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of people 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 people also experience difficulty sleeping.

Symptoms may also include joint pain, memory difficulties, palpitations and urinary issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

Members of staff are responsible for:

- Taking personal responsibility to look after their health.
- Speaking to the town clerk if they have any issues.
- Being open and honest in conversations with the town clerk/staffing committee.
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment.
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues.
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.
- Respecting confidentiality and privacy regarding colleagues' health information.

Town Clerk:

- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally.
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented.
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates.
- Ensure that adjustments are adhered to.
- Ensure that all managers and councillors receive awareness training on menopause and its potential impact in the workplace.
- Monitor the effectiveness of adjustments and support, and seek feedback from those affected.
- Signpost staff to available support, including Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), Occupational Health, and external resources.
- Ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Symptom Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively those listed below. Support for individuals should be considered as detailed below:

Hot flushes

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk, or moving away from a heat source.
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.
- Permit staff to work from home for a time, where possible.

Headaches

- Have ease of access to drinking water.
- Offer a quiet place to work.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open spaces.
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider flexible working, particularly if suffering from 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 if possible).
- 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 agree 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 a quiet space to work.
- Offer noise reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Reduce interruptions, where possible.
- 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

- Promote the Mindful Employer – 24-hour counselling helpline service, available to employees.)
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Encourage and allow reasonable time for mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Where possible, adjustments should be tailored to the individual's needs and regularly reviewed for effectiveness.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited the 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.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Town Clerk may:

- Discuss with the staff member a referral to Occupational Health for further advice.

- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, were reasonably practical.
- Update any action plan and continue to review.
- Consider signposting to additional support services, such as menopause support groups, NHS resources, or charities.

Confidentiality

All conversations regarding menopause and related health conditions will be treated in strict confidence. Information will only be shared with relevant parties with the individual's explicit consent, and in compliance with GDPR.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Witham Town Council is committed to ensuring that no employee or councillor is discriminated against, harassed, or victimised because of menopause or related health conditions. The Council will make reasonable adjustments as required under the Equality Act 2010 and foster a culture of respect and inclusion.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation or best practice. Feedback from staff and councillors will be sought to ensure the policy remains effective and supportive.

WTC57

Adopted: Monday 9th October 2023, at the meeting of the Staffing Committee.

Reviewed: 23rd June 2025

For review: June 2027