

Menopause & Hormonal Changes Policy

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Document control

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Strategic alignment

Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority - Improve North Lanarkshire's resource base.

Ambition statement - Build a workforce for the future capable of delivering on our priorities and shared ambition

Programme of Work

Statutory / corporate / service requirement

Next review date

Review Date	2 years from date of committee approval
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1. Introduction

The Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all our employees and appreciates that the effects of menopausal, or significant hormonal changes, can have an impact on employees both directly and/or indirectly. This policy is predominantly aimed at women; however, it also provides for men, Trans*, non-gender and cis-gender people and whilst not everyone experiences these symptoms, it is considered a wider organisational concern which may affect anyone in our workforce.

Menopause and hormonal changes can impact on a person's emotional wellbeing and exacerbate life stressors, caring responsibilities, and work life balance. Without appropriate support employees can be left feeling vulnerable and this can impact negatively on their work and their role within the Council.

As a Council, we support an inclusive organisational culture and are committed to working towards removing all barriers and breaking down the stigma of this topic within our places of work so that more employees can feel confident and comfortable, to talk openly about menopause and other hormonal changes, and can get the support they may need.

The Scottish Government (SG) launched the Women's Health Plan in 2021 which can be accessed [here](#). Its aim is to improve health outcomes and health services for all women and girls in Scotland. The North Lanarkshire Council Menopause and Hormonal Changes Policy will ensure that the Council is adopting best practice and providing our workforce with access to the wealth of resources and support that has been developed as part of the Women's Health Plan.

2. Purpose

This council recognises that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution and therefore this policy will act as a support guide for all employees and line Managers and Line Managers.

The main aim of the policy is: -

- To support our employees to be empowered to instigate conversations openly and comfortably or engage in discussions about menopause and any other hormonal change signs and symptoms which are impacting on a person’s working day.
- To help support employees to remain at work and to be able to effectively function in their role to their fullest potential.
- To educate and inform all employees about the potential indicators, how to support employees, appreciate and understand the challenges people may be experiencing and where information, advice and support is available within the Council.

3. Scope and exclusions

In scope: This policy applies to all employees of the Council regardless of gender, sexual orientation, level, function, seniority, status, or other protected characteristics.

4. Associated Policies and Legislation

Council Policies

Managers, Line Managers and Employees should be aware of the following employment policies which may be considered in conjunction with the Menopause and Hormonal Changes Policy: -

- Smarter Working Policy
- Special Leave Policy
- F7 Leave of Absence for Teachers and Associated Professionals
- Supporting Attendance Policy and Procedures
- Managing Attendance for Teachers and Associated Professionals
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- Dignity At Work Policy

Legislation

- Equality Act 2010
 - Under the Equality Act (2010) menopause is covered under three protected characteristics: age, sex, and disability discrimination. This act protects people from discrimination in the workplace, which includes direct and indirect discrimination and harassment.
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
 - This Act provides for safe working, which extends to the working conditions when experiencing menopausal signs and symptoms.
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations/Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Chief Officers

- Ensure the development, implementation and communication of the policy and supporting frameworks and to promote a healthy working environment.
- Ensure that this policy is shared with all Managers within their service areas and that a fair and equal working environment is promoted.
- Create and facilitate an environment that encourages Managers and Line Managers to approach conversations with employees in a supportive and positive manner, treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Managers and Line Managers

- Ensure they familiarise themselves with this policy and any associated guidance.
- Ensure all employees are made aware of this policy, through internal communications and training, to increase their understanding and awareness of menopause and hormonal changes and the impact this can have on a person either directly or indirectly in their working environment.
- Offer employees support when issues relating to menopause, or hormonal changes, are raised by keeping lines of communication open.
- Approach conversations respectfully and supportively with positive commitment to understanding people's specific needs.

- Take time to understand any potential barriers for the person and what support they could benefit from to help them maintain their full potential.
- Undertake a risk assessment and continue to review regularly to make sure employees' working environments remain safe and healthy.
- Consider any reasonable adjustment requests received which would help and support employees within their working environment.
- Ensure on-going communication and, if required, agree a plan for review.
- Where a member of employees reports on-going difficulties, or concerns, about their wellbeing at work a line manager must consider a referral to Occupational Health for further advice and support.

Employees

- Employees should familiarise themselves with this policy in order to increase their understanding and awareness of menopause and hormonal changes and the impact this can have on a person either directly or indirectly in their working environment.
- Take responsibility for their own wellbeing and take reasonable steps to look after both their physical and mental health. This includes seeking medical advice and treatment as and when required. The Council recognises that obtaining medical advice and treatment can be a lengthy and stressful process and additional support is available through our organisation.
- Where appropriate, take responsibility to communicate any health issues or concerns which may impact on their performance or attendance at work.
- If they feel unable to speak to their line manager, they can also speak to members of the Employment and Policy team, Union Representatives, Dignity at Work Officer, or a colleague where appropriate.
- Work with their line manager to consider and discuss solutions to help improve their situation, especially if they feel their performance is being impacted.
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.

People Resources

- Provide advice and support to employees and line Managers and Line Managers on the content and application of this policy.
- Promote awareness including training and education for employees and Managers and Line Managers regarding menopause and hormonal change situations.

- Provide information on when to refer employees to Occupational Health.
- Provide support and advice to employees, line Managers and Line Managers in relation to reasonable workplace adjustments, if required.
- Signpost appropriate sources regarding health-related issues because of menopause and hormonal changes.

6. Support Mechanisms

This policy will be supported by guidance and information toolkits for Managers and Line Managers and employees. The Council will ensure that employees that do not have ready access to online resources will still be able to access the toolkits by other means.

7. Types of Menopause and Hormonal Changes

7.1 Natural Menopause

A natural ageing process for women, cisgender*, Trans* men and non-binary* people. Signs and symptoms are caused by oestrogen fluctuations and ultimate decline of this hormone in the body.

Natural Menopause is when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months and the ovaries have stopped producing eggs and hormones, notably testosterone, oestrogen, and progesterone, fall below a certain level.

Studies show that menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, however it can happen much earlier, for example, through primary ovarian insufficiency. Research states that there can be a variation between different ethnic backgrounds in the average age menopause can take place.

*The definition of these terms is contained in [Appendix 2](#)

7.2 Medical or Surgical Menopause

This can occur at any age when the ovaries are damaged by medical treatments, for example chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or they have been removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Although natural menopause can involve a gradual change, the changes through medical or surgical menopause can be more sudden.

7.3 Peri-Menopausal

This is the period of hormonal changes which takes place leading up to natural menopause.

During this time, a person can start to experience symptoms and they can often last anywhere from a few months to five years.

This period can also be referred to as the menopausal transition phase and climacteric stage, which refers to the transition from the reproductive to the non-reproductive period in a person's life.

7.4 Premature Menopause

Approximately one in every one hundred cisgender women may experience a premature natural menopause, before the age of 40; as estimated by NHS.

7.5 Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Changes in a person's body hormone levels before a period can cause physical and emotional changes.

This is also known as Premenstrual Tension (PMT). Potential signs and symptoms are listed in section 10.0 of this policy.

People can experience heavy periods throughout their menstrual cycle. They can sometimes be heavy at various times which can include after pregnancy, during menopause or if a person is feeling stressed.

Some medicines and treatments, including anticoagulant medicines and chemotherapy medicines can have a significant impact on a person.

There are some conditions which can affect a person's womb, ovaries, or hormones, such as:

- Endometriosis
- Fibroids
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome
- Womb Cancer

7.6 Hormonal Changes

People undertaking hormone therapy will remain on this throughout their lives. However, if hormone therapy is interrupted, or levels are unstable, they can experience similar menopausal indicators.

Hormonal changes can be experienced by people going through several types of treatment, for example cancer treatments and chemotherapy. The treatment can cause

an imbalance in a person's previous hormonal levels causing them to experience signs and symptoms like the menopause.

7.7 Hormone Therapy for a Trans* Person

The aim of hormone therapy is to make a person more comfortable with themselves, both in terms of physical appearance and how they feel. The therapy will usually need to be taken for the rest of their lives, even after gender surgery.

The common risks or side effects of having hormone therapy can include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Blood clots
- Gallstones
- Weight gain
- Acne
- Hair loss or balding
- Infertility
- Developing deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism
- Abnormal liver function

7.8 Menopause in people who were not born with a Uterus, also known as Andropause.

It is where the production of testosterone and other hormones declines gradually over a period of many years. Indicators may vary from person to person however the common signs can be like those of a person going through the menopause. Please refer to section 10.3.3.

7.9 Post Menopause and Post Hormonal Changes

This is the time following menopause. Although signs and symptoms are known to subside, they can continue for approximately four to twelve years.

8. Potential Signs and Symptoms of Menopause and Hormonal Changes

The severity of these may vary for individuals, which may differ from mild to significant and the signs and symptoms can change, and new ones can develop over time. Menopausal and hormonal changes can also aggravate pre-existing health conditions.

In some cases, signs and symptoms can be exacerbated by the work environment, for example, workplace environment temperature may have an impact on the frequency of a person's hot flushes.

The most common reported signs and symptoms are contained in the tables below (these lists are not exhaustive)

Menopause and Peri-Menopausal	
Changes to regular menstrual cycles, becoming irregular, heavier, longer	Dental and oral health changes
Hair changes, including loss and thinning	Eye and skin irritation, dryness to skin and chronic adult acne
Fatigue	Increased body fat
Genito-Urinary issues (incontinence, increased UTI, vaginal discomfort)	Insomnia and sleep disturbances
Headaches	Joint aches
Hot flushes and palpitations	Lack of libido
Lack of enthusiasm, energy, or motivation	Night sweats (increased sweating may also be experienced throughout the day)
Poor concentration	Reduced confidence levels
Imbalanced Hormone Levels	
Chronic adult acne	Confidence level changes
Fertility issues	Headaches
Insomnia and poor-quality sleep	Mood swings
Joint aches	Unexplained weight gain
Andropause	
Chronic adult acne	Late-onset hypogonadism
Difficulty sleeping or increased tiredness	Mood swings and irritability
Erectile dysfunction	Loss of muscle mass and reduced ability to exercise

Fat redistribution, such as developing a large belly or enlarged chest	Poor concentration and short-term memory
General lack of enthusiasm or energy	Reduced confidence
Premenstrual Syndrome/ Premenstrual Tension	
Breast tenderness	Feeling bloated
Changes in appetite	Feeling irritable
Changes to skin appearance and hair	Headaches
Mood swings	Tiredness or trouble sleeping
Associated psychological signs (this is not an exhaustive list)	
Anxiety	Cognitive challenges including memory issues, brain fog, poorer concentration
Depression	Feelings of loss and grief
Irritability, sudden onset of anger	Loss of confidence
Mood swings	Panic attacks
Problems with memory	Stress

9. Practical Arrangements

9.1 Line Manager Support

Line Managers and Line Managers are normally the first point of contact a employees member will have to discuss their health concerns with or to raise a request for reasonable adjustments to their working environment.

For some people going through these biological, psychological, and social changes it can be uneventful but for others it will have an impact on their working day, which could affect their ability to function at their optimal level.

A person going through these changes may experience a negative impact on their performance and have a greater susceptibility to fatigue and stress at work. They may also experience a change in their confidence levels.

The signs and symptoms that a person is experiencing may also impact on various aspects of their working conditions and environment. For example, lack of temperature control or ventilation of a person's workplace, material or fit of uniforms, accessibility to toilet facilities and/or access to cold drinking water.

The support an employee receives has a significant impact and influences their experience at work. Employees should feel able to openly discuss this subject and managers should therefore ensure Menopause, and Hormonal Changes and the impact that these may have on employees are also openly discussed at team/service meetings. Open cultures need to be created where people feel comfortable to say if they are struggling.

9.2 Starting the Conversation

A person may find starting the conversation slightly awkward and feel reluctant to talk about sensitive and personal issues and the impact they may have on them at work.

Take time to listen and approach conversations with empathy, use open non-judgemental questions and take care not to make thoughtless comments and assumptions.

It is important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issues. Avoid interruptions, switch off phones, ensure other colleagues cannot walk in and interrupt.

Give the employee a chance to explain the situation in their own words and encourage them to talk by speaking calmly.

Do not make judgements based on personal or previous experience, every case will be different and must be treated as such.

Any conversations a member of employees have with you should be kept strictly confidential, and information should only be shared with the Occupational Health & Wellbeing service when consent has been provided by the employees member concerned.

9.3 Risk Assessment

Whilst menopause itself is not considered a disability in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the symptoms and impact of these on a person's day to day life may well be. Therefore, Managers and Line Managers should ensure that they take all reasonable steps to ensure that a member of employees' symptoms are not being exacerbated by their job or working environment.

A risk assessment will help to identify specific needs. Often, making simple changes can help to alleviate the impact of some signs and symptoms. A template risk assessment can be found here.

Reasonable adjustments can include minor changes, or a person being offered more flexible working arrangements. Practical steps to support employees can help minimise some of the most common signs and symptoms.

The Council will carefully consider any reasonable adjustments in consultation with the individual and Occupational Health/Employment and Policy team. However, the Council does have the right to decline any requests which are not deemed reasonable, suitable, or likely to be effective.

If a person's performance is being impacted by signs and symptoms of menopausal or hormonal changes it is important to address the root cause, as it is in the best interest of the employee, the team, and the Council.

Once a risk assessment has been completed it should be continued to be reviewed frequently. If any reasonable adjustments are identified, advice may be sought from Occupational Health and the Employment and Policy team.

[Appendix 1](#) provides examples of adjustments which may be helpful for various indicators, please note that this is only for guidance.

9.4 Supporting Attendance

Everyone may be affected differently to menopause or hormonal changes and how these impact on their ability to be at work or their performance whilst at work.

The Council will treat employees with menopausal and hormonal changes the same as anyone else with long-term fluctuating health conditions, including considering reasonable adjustment requests in accordance with Equality Act 2010.

Managers and Line Managers should adhere to the relevant Supporting Attendance and Managing Absence Policies where an employee is absent due to the impact of menopause or hormonal changes.

10. Toolkits and Further Sources of Information

In order to support this policy and provide Managers and Line Managers and employees with the relevant resources, toolkits for Managers/Line Managers and employees are available along with links to other sources of information. This information can be found on MyNL.

11. Monitoring and Review

The **Finance and Resources Committee** has **approval** authority for, and oversight of, this policy. The **Employment and Policy Team** – as **key stakeholders** – oversee its review and consider its contents before referring it on for approval. The **Chief Officer of People Resources** – is **accountable** for its governance.

The **Employment and Policy Team** is **responsible** for the following activities.

1. Produce, publish, and promote this policy.
 - a. Write it in a way that is easy to read and understand.
 - b. Consult with relevant stakeholders on its content and implications.
 - c. Make sure all users can access it.
2. Give guidance on how to apply and comply with this policy through standards, toolkits and guidance, legislation and regulations and other related policies and procedures – see here for toolkits and other sources of information.
3. Review and report on this policy.
 - a. Review every two years, with other reviews when needed. For example, following new legislation, new external or internal strategies/plans, to align with best practice.
 - b. Report to management teams, governance and working groups, committees, and scrutiny panels.

Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

The table below provides some examples of adjustments that may be helpful for various symptoms. This is not an exhaustive list.

Symptom	Examples of Workplace factors which could worsen or interact with Symptoms	Suggested adjustments
Daytime sweats, hot flushes, palpitations.	Unsuitable workplace temperatures and lack of ventilation.	Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water and toilet facilities. Take account of shift or peripatetic workers schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day. Carry out 'thermal mapping' to identify hot and cold spots in the workplace and review office seating plans to allow workspace to be positioned based on suitability/need. Look at ways to cool the working environment for those affected, for example fans at workstations, move desks nearer to windows, opening windows and adjust air conditioning.
	Unsuitable uniforms or workwear; unsuitable or ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, face masks/ visors and lead aprons may be uncomfortable if worn for prolonged periods.	Avoid nylon or close-fitting uniforms, provide alternatives made from natural fibres. Ensure all PPE is appropriate in terms of size and materials and that more suitable alternatives are offered if needed. 'One size fit all' blanket issue items are unlikely to be suitable for all members of the workforce.
	Lack of access to rest breaks or suitable break areas. Hot flushes and facial redness may cause women to feel self-conscious or the sensation may affect concentration or train of thought	Be flexible about additional breaks. Allow time out and access to fresh air. Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Ensure cover is available so workers can leave their posts if needed.
Night-time sweats and hot flushes. Insomnia or sleep disturbance.	Rigid start/finish times and lack of flexible working options may increase fatigue at work due to lack of sleep (may be compounded if shift work is carried out).	Consider temporary adjustment of shift patterns or hours to accommodate any difficulties. Allow flexible/home working. Provide the option of alternative tasks/duties. Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets.

Urinary problems, for example, increased frequency, urgency, and increased risk of urinary infections.	Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment, and an increase in stress levels.	Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet.
	Employees member may need to access toilet facilities more frequently; may need to drink more fluids, may feel unwell.	Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water. Take account of peripatetic workers schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day.
Irregular and/or heavy periods.	Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment, and an increase stress level. Employees member may need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently	Ensure easy access to well-maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet/ washroom. Ensure sanitary products readily available. Take account of peripatetic workers schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day. Ensure cover is available so employees can leave their posts if needed.
Skin irritation, dryness, or itching	Unsuitable uniforms, workwear, PPE or workplace temperatures and humidity may increase skin irritation, dryness and itching, there may be discomfort and an increased risk of infection and a reduction in the barrier function of skin	Avoid nylon uniforms. Provide alternatives made from natural fibres with options for layering that can be adjusted. Ensure comfortable working temperatures and humidity. Ensure easy access to well-maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet/ washroom.
Muscular aches and bone and joint pains.	Lifting, moving and manual handling as well as work involving repetitive movements or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable and there may be an increased risk of injury	Make any necessary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules/tasks and keep under review. Consider providing alternative lower risk tasks. Follow HSE guidance and advice on manual handling and preventing MSDs (Musculoskeletal disease)
Headaches	Headaches may be triggered or worsened by many workplace factors such as artificial lighting, poor air quality, exposure to chemicals, screen work, workplace stress, poor posture/ unsuitable workstations, unsuitable uniforms, or workplace temperatures	Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity, and good air quality. Ensure access to natural light and ability to adjust artificial light. Allow additional rest breaks. Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Conduct DSE and stress risk assessments.

<p>Dry eyes.</p>	<p>Unsuitable workplace temperatures/humidity, poor air quality and excessive screen work may increase dryness in the eyes, discomfort, eye strain and increase the risk of infection</p>	<p>Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity, and good air quality. Allow additional breaks from screen-based work. Conduct DSE risk assessments.</p>
<p>Psychological symptoms, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Depression ▪ Anxiety ▪ Panic Attacks ▪ Mood changes ▪ Loss of confidence 	<p>Excessive workloads, unsupportive management and colleagues, perceived stigma around the menopause, bullying and harassment and any form of work-related stress may exacerbate symptoms. Stress can have wide ranging negative effects on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Performance and workplace relationships may be affected</p>	<p>Conduct a stress risk assessment and address work related stress through implementation of the HSE’s management standards. Ensure that workers will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload, tasks, or performance management targets. Ensure that Managers and Line Managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that employees may have in a supportive manner. Ensure Managers and Line Managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Allow flexible/home working where appropriate. Ensure that employees are trained in mental health awareness. Raise general awareness of issues around the menopause so colleagues are more likely to be supportive. Provide opportunities to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues (menopause action and support group). Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Provide access to counselling services.</p>
<p>Psychological symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Memory problems ▪ Difficulty concentrating 	<p>Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms. Loss of confidence may result</p>	<p>Conduct a stress risk assessment and address work related stress through implementation of the HSE’s management standards. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets. Ensure that Managers and Line Managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that employees may have in a supportive manner. Ensure Managers and Line Managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Reduce demands if workload identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed or consider substituting with alternative tasks. Offer and facilitate alternative methods of communicating tasks and planning of work to assist memory. Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Provide access to counselling services</p>

Glossary of Terms

Definitions

A full list of definitions regarding the distinct types of menopause and hormonal changes are listed in Section 9 of this policy.

Hormonal Changes

Hormonal imbalance happens when a person has too much or too little of one or more hormones within a person's chemical balance. It is a broad term that can represent many different hormone-related conditions.

Cisgender

Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Non-Binary

A term that describes someone who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman, or within a specific binary identity. The term can describe several different concepts, and people often use it interchangeably with terms such as agender, androgynous and genderqueer.

Trans*

Trans* is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.