

Introduction

The following guidance was approved by COSLA's Community Wellbeing Board for circulation to Scottish Councils in order to be considered for voluntary adoption (June 2020).

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty Councils are required to advance equality of opportunity and not discriminate unlawfully on the basis of race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, religion or belief, marital status or pregnancy/maternity.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Councils should reflect on policy and practice and consider if they enable those with protected characteristics to engage with but also to sustain participation in public life.

The Menopause Guidance for Councillors should be considered by Councils as part of a suite of measures for staff, volunteers, elected members and the wider public that contribute to equal participation, providing appropriate support in an individual's place of work and enabling equality of opportunity.

Menopause Guidance for Councillors

The Menopause Guidance for Councillors, below, sets out some key principles which Local Authorities may wish to adopt to support Councillors experiencing the menopause.

The objective is to ensure that:

- Council officers understand the difficulties and anxieties of individuals currently going through this change
- Councillors are treated with fairness and dignity whilst undergoing their duties by ensuring where possible, that those experiencing symptoms associated with the menopause receive appropriate support.
- That menopause is not a barrier that prevents individuals from standing or re-standing for elected office.

This guidance is to be adopted and implemented on a voluntary basis and confers no contractual, nor worker / employment status. The guidance can be amended or withdrawn at any time. Councillors continue to retain their status as office holders.

Menopause- Guidance for Councillors

Aims

This guidance has a number of aims:

- 1.1. Members Services and others supporting Councillors are aware of the menopause, related issues and how they can impact individuals.
- 1.2. An environment is created where Councillors feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for adjustments when undertaking their duties.
- 1.3. Member Services and others supporting Councillors have a clear process to follow with regard to how to support Councillors who raise menopause related issues and know where to signpost them for additional support.
- 1.4. Absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms is minimalised.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This guidance applies to all elected members of the Council.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Menopause** is defined as the biological stage when an individual stops menstruating and reaches the end of their natural reproductive life. The menopause is sometimes known as the 'change of life' and, if occurring naturally, is defined as having occurred when no period is experienced for twelve consecutive months. The average age to reach menopause is 51 but it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, illness or other reasons. Those going through menopause may experience both physical and emotional symptoms.
- 3.2. **Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when changes such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms may be experienced. This can be years before menopause.
- 3.3. **Post-menopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when no period has occurred for twelve consecutive months.

For the purpose of this guidance 'menopause' refers to all stages of this process and the symptoms that might relate to them.

4. Symptoms of Menopause

- 4.1. Whilst 75% of those going through menopause experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe, it is important to note that not everyone will experience/notice every symptom, or even need help or support.
- 4.2. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, hot flushes, sweats, poor concentration, insomnia, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, loss of confidence and difficulty sleeping.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1. Councillors are responsible for:

- Taking personal responsibility to look after their health
- Being open and honest in conversations with member services/ supporting officers should they require support
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues.

5.2. Members services and others involved in supporting elected members should:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Guidance
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- Use the additional guidance in Appendices 1 and 2, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported,
- Record support agreed, and actions to be implemented
- Ensure ongoing conversations take place and set review dates
- Ensure that all support agreed is adhered to. Update the Confidential Discussion Template (Appendix 2) and continue to review.

Appendix 1

We recognise that everyone is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

If a Councillor 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 Councillor 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) – provide the Menopause Advice Factsheet if appropriate - www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause/
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template at Appendix 2 to record the meeting), so that all parties agree 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 designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting.

Symptoms Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically and support should be considered as detailed below:

Hot Flushes

- Request temperature control for their desk area, such as a fan on their desk (consider environmentally friendly options) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source
- Easy access to drinking water
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if their duties involve long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush.

Heavy/Light periods

- Have access to toilet facilities.

Headaches

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider how workload can best be managed if suffering from a lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- 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 time with their supporting officers to discuss any issues
- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.

Anxiety

- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Additional support information can be found at:

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause
- www.menopausematters.co.uk
- www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/menopause

Appendix 2

Confidential Discussion – Template

| | | | |
|-------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| | | | |
| Name | | | |
| | | Location of Work | |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Officer name | |
| Date of discussion: | |

Summary of Discussion:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Agreed Actions/Adjustments:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Date of next review meeting