PERIOD AND MENOPAUSE POLICY

Executive summary

1. This paper invites Leadership Group to agree to a Period and Menopause Policy and supporting guidance (attached as Annexes to this paper).

2. In 2017 the Women’s Network carried out a consultation on the menopause following Monica Lennon MSP’s parliamentary question on free sanitary products to the SPCB. It was felt that a policy would be a positive step towards supporting staff and managers to understand the impact of periods and the menopause at work. Working with colleagues from the HR Office, the consultation has shown wide support from staff and managers and was endorsed by the Diversity and Inclusion Board in January 2019.

Issues and Options

3. The symptoms of periods and the menopause affect many members of staff; 55% of the workforce are women and the average age of women working in the organisation is 44. Symptoms can have a negative impact on someone’s personal and working life and, whilst not everyone will suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. There is often an impact on partners, families and colleagues too.

4. Showing commitment to staff who are affected can help address the lack of awareness and knowledge about the menstrual cycle and menopause and reduce the stigma around them too. It can also help us put practical measures in place to enable people to overcome any challenges they may face. A policy and guidance on periods and menopause will help line managers and staff in understanding the symptoms and will aid effective conversations around possible practical adjustments.

5. Feedback was sought from HR, SPOut, ParliAble, TUS and managers (including the Grade 6 Network) and our Occupational Health Advisers to identify the need for additional support for staff experiencing period and menopausal symptoms. We found that some staff said they would find it difficult to have these conversations with managers, particularly if they are of the opposite sex. A policy will enable managers to be better equipped to positively engage with their staff around issues that affect them. We sought feedback from Group Heads on specific needs of staff and how this policy could be applied inclusively, for example, working flexible hours or adjusting working patterns or practices to suit the needs of the person.

Resource Implications

6. There are no additional resource implications with introducing the new policy. The HR Office and Women’s Network will be involved in launching the policy and communicating the key messages to all staff.
Dependencies

7. Successful implementation is dependent on Group Heads, Office Heads/Team Leaders and other managers in encouraging open and honest dialogue with staff.

Next Steps/Governance Issues

8. The following actions will need to be achieved in order to create an environment in which line managers and colleagues can positively engage in discussions about periods, the menopause and the support that might be required:

- Personal endorsement and buy-in from Leadership Group and an understanding of their role in communicating the Policy to staff;
- Other relevant HR Policies will be updated to make a clear reference to the new Policy;
- Colleagues will be educated through refreshing Learning and Development toolkits and workshops (for managers/staff/induction);
- The guidance around Performance Management will be updated to ensure staff and managers feel empowered having supportive conversations;
- The Policy and Guidance will be linked with the different sections in the staff handbook, e.g. under the categories ‘Achieving Good Health and Well Being’ and ‘Creating an Effective Work Life Balance’ and;
- In collaboration with the Women’s Network, education and awareness raising sessions.

A joint communications plan between HR and the Women’s Network will be created in line with the launch of the Policy. An EQIA has been carried out.

MRO have been informed and we will work with them in planning and communicating plans for the launch of the policy and guidance. Feedback on the effectiveness of the policy will be taken forward by the Women’s Network, supported by HR.

Publication Scheme

9. This paper should be published in line with the SPCB’s Publication Scheme.

Communications

9. The HR Office, in collaboration with the Networks, will launch the policy and supportive guidance, seeking feedback as appropriate

Decision

10. Leadership Group are invited to comment and agree the draft Policy and supporting guidance.

HR Office and Women’s Network
May 2019
Periods and Menopause - Policy Statement

The SPCB is committed to providing an inclusive working environment for all staff throughout all stages of their working lives. This includes creating a culture where staff experiencing problematic periods or menopausal symptoms get the support they need to manage their symptoms at work.

Who this policy is for

It’s important for everyone to have an understanding of the menstrual cycle and the menopause. This is not just an issue for those who experience them: everyone who works at the Parliament should be aware. There is often an impact on partners, families and colleagues too.

Showing commitment to staff who are affected can help address the lack of awareness and knowledge about periods and the menopause and reduce the stigma around them too.

It can also help us put practical measures in place to enable people to overcome any challenges they may face.

It is supported by Guidance for managers and staff that contains:

- definitions of symptoms
- the support available
- practical steps and adjustments that should be considered to make working life more flexible for those experiencing symptoms

Why this policy is important

Periods and the menopause can have a negative impact on someone’s personal and working life. Although not everyone will suffer symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. Creating an inclusive culture will encourage staff to ask for what they need, without fear of being judged.

This policy is underpinned by the organisation’s values of stewardship, inclusiveness, excellence and respect. These values are essential to building a culture where everyone feels positively valued.

The Equality Act 2010 states that it’s illegal to discriminate against someone based on protected characteristics. These include age, gender reassignment, disability and sex, which can all be related to the menopause and its associated symptoms. Failing to provide support to someone experiencing the menopause can amount to discrimination under the 2010 Act.

How this will be achieved

To make sure the right culture and support is in place, the SPCB will:

- Create an environment in which colleagues can openly and honestly initiate conversations or engage in discussions about periods or the menopause, whether they, or someone they know, is experiencing difficult symptoms.
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of periods and menopause and how they can support people who are going through issues at work.
• Empower those experiencing period-related or menopausal symptoms to discuss and ask for support and reasonable adjustments to continue to be successful in their role.

• Ensure that staff understand what periods and menopause are, and are confident about having meaningful conversations, clear about our policies and practices and supported by HR and Occupational Health.
Guidance on periods and the menopause

This guidance lists the possible symptoms that those having problematic periods and/or going through the menopause may experience.

It includes suggestions for managers about meeting specific needs and making workplace adjustments.

Circumstances will differ but, for some people, being at work can help them cope with their symptoms. That said, a significant number of people experience problems at work because of their symptoms.

Those who have periods and/or experience the menopause often develop coping strategies that involve hiding/masking or managing their symptoms, so others are not aware they are having difficulties.

It’s important that anyone experiencing these issues feels able to discuss them with their line manager. By having regular conversations with them, their line manager can provide the right support.

Because of the differences in people’s experiences and working patterns and environments, a ‘one size fits all’ approach in the workplace will not be effective.

This guidance is to help line managers and staff:

- understand the symptoms of the menstrual cycle and the menopause
- have effective conversations about possible practical adjustments

Responsibilities

All members of staff are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the Policy and guidance.
- Contributing to a respectful and productive work environment and being willing to help and support their colleagues. This includes any adjustments colleagues are receiving because of their period or menopausal symptoms.
- Taking personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and raising any concerns with their line manager. (if you feel unable to speak to your line manager, you can get advice from HR.)
- Being open and honest when having conversations with line managers/HR/Occupational Health.

All line managers are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the Policy and guidance.
- Providing opportunities for staff to raise any issues relating to their wellbeing, including: being willing to have open discussions about periods and the
menopause, acknowledging the personal nature of conversations about these topics and treating them professionally and confidentially.

- Agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported and being prepared to make reasonable adjustments to take account of any symptoms they are experiencing.
- Discussing a referral to Occupational Health for more advice and support, if needed, and implementing any recommendations where reasonably practical.
- Discussing what, if any, information should be shared with colleagues, how this will be done, by who and in a way that respects the individual’s privacy but that allows colleagues to understand.
- Dealing with any inappropriate conduct towards someone because of their symptoms.
What the menopause is

The medical definition of menopause is when someone stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. Menopausal symptoms occur when natural oestrogen levels fall. There are various stages to the menopause, as highlighted below.

It’s estimated in the UK that by 2020 one in three workers will be over 50. The same trend is anticipated for Parliament, where 1 in 3 staff will be over 50.

The first phase is known as perimenopause or menopause transition. This can begin several years before the menopause and is the phase where the ovaries stop producing eggs and periods can be altered and/or absent due to a reduction in oestrogen hormone. This phase can start at the age of 30 but is more likely to occur in the 40’s. During this phase many may experience symptoms the same as those that occur during the menopause

Next is the menopause which is when periods stop. This can begin between the ages of 45 and 55. Some people will experience it at a younger age and some symptoms may be experienced over varying lengths of time.

Early menopause happens when periods stop before the age of 45. It can happen naturally or as a side effect of some treatments such as thyroid problems, hysterectomy, chemotherapy. Many other conditions or medications can impact the start of the menopause.

Post-menopause is the time after the menopause transition has ended. Symptoms usually disappear, but low hormone levels can prolong symptoms and pose other health risks.

Symptoms and support — menopause

Not everyone will notice every symptom, or even need help or support.

However, 75% of people experience some symptoms and 25% could be classed as severe. Symptoms can include:

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- headaches
- anxiety
- irregular heavy/light periods
- loss of confidence
- difficulty sleeping
- poor concentration
- panic attacks
- irritability
- mood swings
There can also be an impact on cognitive functions, for example:

- not remembering things
- inability to readily find the right word to express thoughts aloud
- having thoughts completely disappear mid-sentence

These are symptoms that people might not recognise as a physical issue. All of them can lead to lower productivity and reduced job satisfaction.

Self-management and relevant support from managers and colleagues are likely to help staff to manage their symptoms. It may also be important for staff to seek medical advice from their GP.

**Line manager support — menopause**

There are some specific aspects of work that can make symptoms worse, such as:

- inadequate ventilation
- high temperatures
- humidity and dryness
- stress related to workloads
- deadlines and pressures
- lack of drinking water or quiet rest areas
- not being able to take regular breaks

Some *practical physical steps* can be taken, in discussion with the line manager, to make working life more flexible and can include:

- Providing options for individual control of the temperature in the work area, such as by providing a fan, moving near a window or away from a heat source
- Having easy access to drinking water
- Having ready access to washroom facilities where sanitary products are available
- Working flexible hours and/or working at home or adjusting working pattern/practice if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse
- Reviewing task allocation and workload
- Discussing and providing any memory-assisting equipment. There are many apps available through Office 365. Your line manager can advise on [IT upskilling](#)
- Having access to a quiet area
- Taking breaks where needed for time-out from others
- Trying mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk
- Allowing uniforms to be adapted or offering additional clothing items (for staff who are required to wear uniform)
- Ensuring storage space is available for a change of clothing
- Identifying a ‘buddy’ for the colleague to talk to, outside of the work area
• Identifying a ‘time-out place’ to be able to go to ‘clear their head’
• Taking time off during the working day to attend medical appointments, if required
• Signposting the individual to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider, further details below

For those who work on a rostered shift pattern, every effort will be made to:

• rearrange rostered positions
• enable staff to take regular breaks to manage their symptoms

Where adjustments affect other colleagues in a shared work space (for example, when implementing any of the practical steps, or making changes to someone’s role) staff need to feel comfortable explaining to colleagues why the changes are necessary.

This is why it’s important to have a supportive organisational culture around menopause transition.

These websites may be helpful for those who are (or think they may be) menopausal. And for line managers and colleagues who want to know more about the symptoms:

https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/

It may also be helpful to discuss a referral to Occupational Health to get more advice about the impact of the symptoms the person’s experiencing. And also for guidance on any potential adjustments to the person’s role.

This can be arranged through HR. Again, it’s also important for staff to seek medical advice from their GP.
What periods are

A period is the part of the menstrual cycle where bleeding occurs. This can last anytime between 3 and 8 days. This usually happens once a month from puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy.

Changes in body hormone levels before a monthly period can cause physical and emotional changes.

Symptoms and support — periods

Not everyone will experience every symptom, or even need help or support. But most people will experience some symptoms. These can include:

- abdominal or pelvic cramping
- lower back pain
- bloating and sore breasts
- food cravings
- mood swings and irritability
- headache and fatigue

PMS (premenstrual syndrome) is the name for the symptoms experienced in the weeks before a period.

If you have a health problem, such as depression, irritable bowel syndrome, migraine or asthma, symptoms might get worse before a period starts.

Some practical physical steps can be taken within the workplace. They’re similar to those outlined for the menopause. But it’s important to recognise that circumstances, and so conversations, will be different.

Line management support — periods

In discussion with the line manager, these adjustments can be considered to make working life more flexible for those dealing with periods at work:

- allowing time for regular toilet breaks
- reviewing task allocation and workload
- working flexible hours and/or at home
- taking days off if required or leave early, perhaps to resume working later in the day or evening

The following websites may be helpful for those who have issues with their periods. And for line managers and colleagues who want to know more about symptoms:

https://www.womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/
https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/information

Employee Assistance Programme

We recognise that if someone’s experiencing symptoms associated with the menopause or periods (or if someone they know is) they may need additional support.

Support is available through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider, or if they’re a member, they can talk to their Trade Union representative.
A template for confidential conversations

This template may be helpful for managers who need to record conversations and agree any actions and adjustments.

A member of staff may want to:

- speak about their symptoms
- talk about how they are feeling
- speak about another colleague or family member

If that’s the case, this might be a useful template if you’re a manager who needs to record conversations and agree actions and adjustments. It’s important to:

- Familiarise yourself with the Policy and Guidance
- Allow enough time to have the conversation and in an appropriate place
- Encourage your staff member to speak openly and honestly
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see Line Manager Support/Symptoms, above)
- Agree actions and how to implement them
- Agree if other members of the team should be told and by whom
- Allow time for a follow-up meeting if needed

Summary of Discussion:
Agreed Actions/Adjustments:

Reviewing Adjustments (for the member of staff and line manager to discuss whether the adjustments are working):