

Women's Reproductive Health Policy

Introduction

At Westminster City Council we believe that "it is OK not to be okay". Our people are what makes the council the place it is and enables us to deliver a City for All. We cannot separate the 'employee' from the 'person', and we encourage and support our people to bring their whole selves to work. Health and wellbeing are key elements of our vision; therefore, we feel it is important to address the topic of women's reproductive health in the workplace. Especially as 57% of our staff population are female.

What is women's reproductive health?

Women's health is unique to females, female gynaecological and maternal anatomy and biochemistry. Please note that for the purposes of this policy "Women" includes anyone assigned female at birth, regardless of their gender identity. This policy is also applicable to anyone who may have decided to undergo medical or surgical procedures for gender reassignment.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), defines reproductive health as a "state of physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It addresses the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life and implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so."

There are many different women's reproductive health issues which may impact on a member of staff's health in the workplace, but there are some main areas that we want this policy to recognise:

1. **Menstrual Cycle & Menstrual Conditions:** [Heavy periods](#); [painful periods](#); [irregular periods](#); [Fibroids](#); [Endometriosis](#); [Adenomyosis](#); [Polycystic Ovary Syndrome \(PCOS\)](#); [Premenstrual Syndrome \(PMS\)](#); [Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder \(PMDD\)](#).
2. **Maternity:** [Infertility](#); [Fertility Treatment](#); [Pregnancy](#); [Antenatal Mental Health](#); [Postnatal Mental Health](#); [Breastfeeding](#); [Miscarriage](#) and [Stillbirth](#).

3. **Menopause & Post-reproductive Care:** [Early or premature menopause](#); [surgical and chemical menopause](#); [Perimenopause](#); [Post-menopause](#); [HRT](#); [Pelvic health](#); [Osteoporosis](#); [Alzheimer's](#); [heart disease](#).
4. **Cancer:** [Breast cancer](#); [Cervical cancer](#).

The most effective way to explain why a women's reproductive health issue might affect their ability to carry out the day-to-day duties required of their role, is by highlighting some of the common symptoms associated with them.

Some of the common *physical* symptoms are:

- Heavy, painful, irregular periods
- Migraines
- Pelvic and back pain
- Fatigue
- Joint and muscle pain
- Breast soreness
- Hot flushes & night sweats
- Sleep problems
- Gut issues e.g. IBS
- Vaginal problems
- UTI's and recurring thrush
- Hypersensitivity to stimuli

Some of the common *psychological* symptoms are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Mood changes
- Irritability
- Feeling out of control
- More emotional
- Loss of confidence
- Socially withdrawn
- Self-deprecating
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts

The Westminster Way

We are fighting the stigma around women's reproductive health issues in the workplace and encouraging people to have open conversations on the subject.

As well as making reasonable adjustments, we support our people working as agilely as their roles allow. Loss of confidence and presenteeism, along with performance and productivity issues are just some of the ways women's reproductive health issues will have an impact at work. In order to ensure that the council is doing all it can to recognise this and support staff in this area, this policy highlights the expectations that we have of both line managers and staff members.

The physical work environment

Women affected by the menopause report that the physical work environment can impact their symptoms. Therefore, wherever possible, is important to consider and adapt their work environment. Some things to consider could be to regulate the temperature and ventilation of the space and provide fans, ensure easy access to sanitary and toilet facilities and have readily available drinking water.

Expectations of managers

- **Show compassion and understanding:** you can ask/say things like "describe how you're feeling. I'm listening", "I can see you're really anxious, what can I do to help?"; as opposed to saying "don't worry, stay positive!", "Everything will be OK in the end."
- **Be respectful and take these kinds of conversations seriously:** in the same way as any other physical or mental health condition.
- **Signpost and support:** Have they spoken to their GP? Are they receiving treatment? Do they know where to find information and support? Have they utilised the [Employee Assistance Programme](#)? Would they like to be referred to [Occupational Health](#)?
- **Reasonable adjustments:** Although reproductive health conditions may not be in and of themselves disabilities, for many women, the effects of the symptoms can amount to a disability. In such cases, we must make reasonable adjustments for those affected. Discuss and actively consider whether any adjustments need to be made to the role/workplace. As the effects are variable amongst women (some will encounter considerable difficulties, whereas others may not suffer from any significant problems), it is important to understand that this will require individual rather than 'one size fits all' approaches. Familiarise yourself with

our [special leave guidance](#); staff should be permitted the time needed for medical appointments relating to such conditions, without being questioned.

- **Please do not be afraid to ask for help:** if for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing personal issues such as this with your team member, then we would encourage you to engage the support of the Women's Network (womensnetwork@westminster.gov.uk), a [Wellbeing Pioneer](#) or one of our Menopause Ambassadors ([click here](#) to see who they are), to support these conversations.

Expectations of staff

- **Help us to help you:** do not be afraid to have an open and frank conversation with your line manager. Also, tell us what you need from us, to enable us to provide the support you need; maybe even consider using a [wellness action plan](#) to steer the conversation with your line manager.
- **Courage to challenge:** if you are unable to speak with your manager about this, because they are not fulfilling the council's expectations of them (as above); then please do speak up. You can reach out directly to the Women's Network (womensnetwork@westminster.gov.uk), your local Wellbeing Pioneer or one of our Menopause Ambassadors ([click here](#) to see who they are); or to a member of the Wellbeing and Reward team ([Giorgia Fiorillo](#), [Nerissa Caesar](#)).

Sources of information and support

- BiBorough health and wellbeing hub
 - <https://officesharedservice.sharepoint.com/sites/HealthandWellbeingHub/SitePages/womens-health.aspx>
- Employee Assistance Programme
 - <https://officesharedservice.sharepoint.com/sites/HealthandWellbeingHub/SitePages/Employee-assistance-programme.aspx>
- Occupational Health
 - <https://officesharedservice.sharepoint.com/sites/HealthandWellbeingHub/SitePages/Occupational-Health.aspx>
- Corporate Health and Safety hub
 - <https://officesharedservice.sharepoint.com/sites/WCCCorporateHealthandSafetyHub>
- CIPD guide - [The Menopause At Work - A practical guide for people managers](#)
- Menopause at Work [online eLearning module](#)
- [Wellness Action Plan](#)
- Women's Health Concern - <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

- Daisy Network - <https://www.daisynetwork.org/>
- PANDAS - <https://pandasfoundation.org.uk/>
- Tommy's - <https://www.tommys.org/>
- Endometriosis UK - <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/>
- The International Association for Premenstrual Disorders - <https://iapmd.org/>
- Your GP