

Mayor announces world-leading menopause policy

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The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has announced a world-leading menopause policy which will put in place practical steps to better support women and all colleagues going through menopause transition at City Hall, and introduce measures to shift perceptions surrounding menopause in the workplace.

The new menopause policy, one of Sadiq's manifesto promises, comes on International Women's Day, following thorough consultation with staff and unions, and will apply to City Hall staff.

The menopause is when a woman stops having periods, and the frequency and severity of menopausal symptoms will vary from person to person, but can include hot flushes, anxiety and disrupted sleep.

The Mayor's policy is leading the way in recognising the long term effects of the menopause, and that staff experiencing it are entitled to request suitable support and workplace adjustments. This could mean ensuring that the working environment is comfortable wherever possible, for instance with temperature-controlled areas, as well as flexible adjustments to the working day to accommodate the need to take breaks if symptoms become severe, time off to attend medical appointments, or suitable changes to work tasks when experiencing symptoms. This will ensure that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue.

This new approach also aims to challenge the taboo surrounding menopause, which can prevent staff from accessing the support they need or leave them feeling embarrassed or anxious in the workplace.

City Hall's policy outlines that all staff are responsible for having a general awareness of menopause issues, and to challenge inappropriate behaviour or derogatory remarks about the menopause. This is to create an environment where staff can comfortably discuss their symptoms and request suitable

arrangements, as well as equipping managers with the information they need to better understand the health implications of the menopause and what support they should provide to ensure staff can continue working effectively in their role.

The Mayor's policy comes as research shows that around 80 per cent of women will experience noticeable menopause symptoms [1], both physical and psychological, while 59 per cent of those going through the menopause said that they experience symptoms that affect them at work [2]. A 2019 survey found that three in five menopausal women in the UK were negatively affected by symptoms at work, and almost one million women in the UK have left their job because of menopausal symptoms [3]. The survey also showed that 72 per cent of menopausal women felt unsupported at work; 30 per cent had taken sick leave; and over half did not disclose the reason for their absence from work.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "Employers have a responsibility to create truly inclusive workplaces and part of that means ensuring there is an understanding of the menopause and how it can affect staff, and challenging the taboos surrounding the subject, which all too often prevent people from getting the support they need.

"I am a proud feminist and strongly believe that women of all ages deserve to feel welcomed and accepted at work.

"This is why I am pleased to announce that City Hall is leading the way with our progressive menopause policy.

"There should be no stigma or shame associated with the menopause, and by opening up this conversation, I want to show that a workplace discussion about menopause is normal, and that we can remove the stigma around those experiencing the menopause. I want to encourage all other employers across London and the country to learn from our approach and follow suit."

UNISON general secretary, Christina McAnea, said: "The emotional and physical changes of the menopause can't be underestimated. Nor can their effect on women's jobs.

"Good employers want to ensure the best possible working environment. Women must be able to do their jobs in comfort and not feel stigmatised either.

"Flexible working can make a real difference. Employers must also be careful not to penalise women for taking more time off sick if it's down to the menopause.

"Working alongside UNISON, the Mayor and Greater London Assembly have created a bold, supportive policy that leads the way.

"Other employers should follow suit by fostering a safer, fairer workplace for women experiencing the menopause. That's the way to encourage experienced and skilled staff to stay in work."

Rachel Suff, Senior Policy Advisor, CIPD, said: "The CIPD is very pleased to see City Hall's new menopause policy launched. Half the workforce will experience menopause transition at some stage so this an important issue for every workplace. The majority of women will have symptoms that affect how well they work but very often, simple adjustments can transform someone's ability to carry on working effectively. By creating menopause friendly workplaces where women can access support and understanding,

employers will be in a much better position to retain valuable skills and talent. There's no need for women to press pause on their careers because of a natural life event."

Image credit: Greater London Authority