



Supporting Women in the Workplace

Women represent 64% of the workforce at the Council.

Issues relating to women's health have been discussed more widely in recent years and with better awareness comes more information for our managers and leaders on how we can support our female colleagues within the workplace.

Periods

In 2019, People Management magazine reported that many women with period-related symptoms felt compelled to lie about their reasons for absence. A survey found that nearly half of respondents felt there was a "noticeable stigma" around period-related health issues, and 30% felt their colleagues didn't take period pain seriously. There is now a growing movement to normalise periods, removing misconceptions, and to help remove the stigma so that individuals can discuss openly discuss their periods, and related health issues with their managers.

The links provided here and later in the document show the research supporting the information within this paper.

[Women compelled to lie about period related absence](#)

[NORMALISE | Bloody Good Period](#)

[BBC Sounds - 28ish days Later](#)

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a condition where cells similar to the ones lining the womb are found elsewhere in the body, usually within the pelvic cavity. Each month these cells react to the menstrual cycle in the same way to those in the womb, building up and then breaking down and bleeding. Unlike the cells in the womb that leave the body as a period, this blood has no way to escape. This leads to inflammation, pain, and the formation of scar tissue (adhesions).

Earlier this year, the House of Commons held a debate to discuss the current lack of support for employees who suffer from endometriosis. The disease affects around 1.5 million people in the UK who experience symptoms such as chronic pelvic pain, bladder and bowel problems, heavy and painful periods, fatigue, depression or anxiety, abdominal bloating and nausea, and difficulties getting pregnant.

Three key areas were identified as providing the most benefit to endometriosis sufferers:

- Flexible working, including the ability to work from home
- Reasonable adjustments, as endometriosis has the potential to be classed as a disability
- Paying sick pay from the first day of absence

[Endometriosis Facts and Figures | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](#)

[Support Groups | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](#)

Fertility

The Fertility Network reports that there are more than 3.5 million people in the UK experiencing fertility problems, with most of them in employment, meaning there will be staff – male and female - in every organisation who will be impacted. Their research shows that most employees are reluctant to speak to their employer about their fertility struggles because of uncertainty about the potential detrimental effect on their career. It is also quite common for staff to end up reducing their hours or quitting their job if they're unable to balance work and fertility issues.

[Fertility Network \(fertilitynetworkuk.org\)](https://www.fertilitynetworkuk.org)

Pregnancy, miscarriage and still-birth

Whilst there has been support and legal protection for pregnant women in the workplace for many years, with policies in place to inform managers and staff of the employment rights and maternity benefits, it is less common to have support in place for instances of miscarriage and still-birth.

With an estimated one in four pregnancies ending in miscarriage, the Miscarriage Association reports that women and their partners don't always feel able to talk about this at work, but when there is support in place it can make a real difference to how people cope. A lack of support can mean reduced productivity, increased absence and even resignation. Sands, is the leading stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK, reports that:

- Women may need up to 8 weeks off work following a miscarriage
- 10% of parents remain off work 6 months following their baby's stillbirth
- 38% of mothers and 21% of partners reduce their working hours following their baby's stillbirth

[The Miscarriage Association: Pregnancy loss information and support](#)

[Sands | Stillbirth and neonatal death charity](#)

Menopause

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline and she stops having periods. Members of the trans and non-binary community can sometimes experience menopause symptoms if they are taking hormonal treatments.

According to a recent Government Report 'menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce'. The average age for a woman to go through menopause is 51. It can be earlier than this, naturally or due to surgery, or illness. Symptoms may start years before menopause, during the perimenopause phase. According to the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), nearly 8 out of 10 of menopausal women are in work. Three out of four women will experience symptoms throughout the stages of the menopause, one in four of these

could experience serious symptoms. The number of tribunal cases that cited menopause jumped 44% from 2020 to 2021.



[British Menopause Society | For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health \(thebms.org.uk\)](https://www.thebms.org.uk)

[Menopause - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Menopause and later life | RCOG](https://www.rcog.org.uk)

Support for our staff:

- Menopause Guidance for staff and managers is available on the intranet
- Ability to refer to Occupational Health and provision of support for managers in considering reasonable adjustments
- Flexible working policy and Leadership Team support for flexibility, including homeworking
- Employee Assistance Programme providing information and support for employees and managers
- GP helpline service
- A number of options are available to cover fertility appointments - flexi-leave, annual leave or special leave can be used (up to 5 days in a 12 month period), and additional annual leave (up to 1 week) can be purchased through the Holiday Flex scheme.
- Paid compassionate leave is available for employees who have experienced pregnancy loss as well as employees whose partner has experienced the physical loss.
- Employees who have experienced a stillbirth are covered by provisions within the maternity policy. In addition, these employees and partners of those who have experienced a stillbirth are entitled to paid bereavement leave.
- Sick pay from day 1 of absence (increasing with service)
- Maternity returners are offered a meeting with HR to welcome them back and support them settle back into work.
- Where additional time off is required to recover from the effects of medical procedures and drug treatment, this should be taken as sick leave. Sick absence related to treatment for infertility are treated as pregnancy related and do not count towards attendance triggers or warnings.
- The Inclusion Group provides a forum to share experiences, raise awareness and continue to ensure the Council is an inclusive employer.