MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	**COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE**		
DATE:	**5 SEPTEMBER 2024**	**REPORT NO:**	**CFO/53/24**
PRESENTING OFFICER	**DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE**		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**NICK MERNOCK**	**REPORT AUTHOR:**	**AMANDA CROSS, MIKE PILKINGTON**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM MIKE PILKINGTON, KELLY PATTERSON GENDER NETWORK/MENOPAUSE LOUNGE**		
TITLE OF REPORT:	**MENOPAUSE SUPPORT**		

APPENDICES:	**APPENDIX A: MENOPAUSE SUPPORT POLICY**

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the positive work undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority ('the Authority') supporting employees through the menopause and to request approval for the updated Menopause Support Policy.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;

   a) note the support offered to menopausal women and other people who have a menstrual cycle including specific guidance documents, the Menopause Lounge support network, and the ability for staff to reclaim Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) prescription costs; and

   b) approve the updated Menopause Policy which includes additional supportive measures developed following consultation with staff.

Introduction and Background

3. In 2022, Officers commenced a review into support available for employees during the menopause. Government survey statistics had shown that 50% of respondents stated they struggled at work due to menopause symptoms. As such, provision of appropriate support and organisational strategies is viewed as vital to ensure women can continue to perform to their fullest potential in the workplace.

4. A staff consultation exercise was undertaken in 2022 involving engagement with staff networks, the Menopause Lounge with an internal staff survey also being completed. This internal data was supported by a review of the Government's 'Menopause in the workplace 2022-2023' study released by The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee.

5. Whilst this review was being undertaken, the Strategic Leadership Team agreed that from 1st April 2022 all employees would be able to reclaim the costs of their HRT prescriptions as part of an interim range of measures, including promotion of existing guidance and the Menopause Lounge, that were designed to improve the range of support offered to menopausal staff.

6. The result was the creation of a new Menopause Support Policy which was approved by the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 6th April 2023.

7. The Menopause Support Policy contained recommendations for a holistic package of support for menopausal women following a "cafeteria" approach where women can use supportive actions that are relevant to their needs at that time, and are the most beneficial, but also cost effective for the organisation. We are pleased to update Members of the progress of many of those activities.

8. A key area proposed related to awareness. Whilst menopause is being increasingly discussed, with its profile raised by the "Davina effect", reflecting the informative programmes made by the presenter on the topic, it can still be a source of embarrassment for women to discuss particularly in the workplace. Only 9% of employees of respondents in our internal menopause awareness survey said they felt able to discuss issues relating to the menopause, with 22% stating they could never discuss it.

9. Officers utilised guidance from the Government's Women's and Equalities commission and developed a wider package of proposals to support menopausal women. This includes simple actions such as reminding managers that the staff appraisal process includes a welfare conversation which should be supportive and encouraging, to developing learning packages aimed to help our staff to be open about seeking support and engaging in positive health measures.

10. A key element proposed was to raise awareness of the menopause by running workshops and seminars utilising the skills of the OH Medical Team. These seminars were aimed at Service Managers and all employees. These are now completed. These were enjoyable and informative sessions. However, after reviewing the post course feedback and in line with the new NFCC Health and Wellbeing recommendations, and NFCC menopause guidance, we have decided that a better offer would be to design informative guidance and e-learning packages to communicate to a wider and more diverse audience. This enables us to additionally reach out and support family members who may not be employees but who are menopausal or supporting our employees.

11. There are 2 learning packages that are in the final development stages. One is aimed at people who will directly experience menopause and the second is for people who may live with, support, or manage colleagues or family members and would like more advice. Both packages have some technical, biological information on menopause, but their primary focus is on destigmatising menopause whilst providing helpful signposting and reassurance. We are grateful to those people who volunteered to be “talking heads” and whose advice and positive experiences will be incorporated into the packages.

12. Since the approval of the initial policy, a self-guided risk assessment has been developed to enable women to structure conversations with their manager, their colleagues, their family, or their GP. It helps women to identify their symptoms, to think about what help would be most beneficial for them and what other support may be a benefit. By having this information, it provides a powerful aide to enable women to make best use and get the greatest help from occasionally unhelpful GP appointments. The info form, which is now on the portal, will come to the Health and Wellbeing team who will contact the employee to signpost them in the best direction for internal help and advice.

13. There is currently a trial for female only gym times, three times per week, which we have extended to include our Police colleagues. This will be reviewed at the end of the trial to assess its effectiveness.

14. On 27th July 2024, one of the country’s most foremost menopause consultants delivered Menopause Champions training. This was for men and women who want to provide a listening ear, but who can additionally signpost employees to areas for support, regardless of whether the request is from a menopausal employee or from someone who wants to support a colleague or family member in or outside of work.

15. The Authority were a major contributor to the new National Fire Chiefs Council (‘NFCC’) menopause guidelines and three of our team are National Champions working to direct and steer national fire service advice and guidance. To strengthen our work further, Liverpool will host this year’s NFCC Menopause Conference on the 11th September 2024 at the Malmaison hotel Liverpool City Centre.

16. There remain some challenges, but these are recognised at a national level such as the difficulties in securing menopause friendly uniform, PPE and practical support on a fireground. However, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service remain committed to working with our Fire and Rescue Service colleagues to find solutions to these common issues.

17. The Menopause Policy has been amended to include some significant changes including the full details of the support offered to staff. A copy of the updated Menopause Policy is contained in Appendix A.

18. During the Community Safety and Protection Committee, Members requested that the language in the original policy was considered to ensure it remained fully

inclusive. Following consultation with the Gender network and review of national guidance the language now used is that as recommended by ACAS. The Policy has also been amended to reflect this recommendation accordingly.

Equality and Diversity Implications

19. Under the Equality Act, the characteristics of age and sex are protected. Adjustments for menopausal women are not just good practice and part of being a responsible employer but would also protect against potential discriminatory actions.

20. A report of the Women's and Equality Committee advised that some respondents, identified as from an ethnic background, thought that their ethnicity had an impact on their experience of menopause in terms of the response of health professionals and managers, the severity of symptoms and increased stigma in some communities. This policy will address directly these concerns by offering supportive Health and Wellbeing Advice and improving awareness of managers.

21. The report also highlighted the experience of younger women who experience menopause and women generally who felt that assumptions and biases around age made it harder for them when experiencing menopause. Again, the Service approach will seek to address these concerns and provide information and education to bust myths and assumptions.

22. A full EIA has been completed and will be regularly updated.

Staff Implications

23. The workforce comprises some 282 female employees, 29% of our total staff and of the female cohort, 112 are aged over 45, over 11% of our staff. The Policy proposes an extensive level of support for our female staff and is an investment in those employees to benefit their wellbeing in the work.

24. The enhancement of the benefits available is a demonstration of going beyond a traditional concept of the duty of care for our staff and is a positive message as an employer to provide to its staff.

Legal Implications

25. In HM Courts and Tribunals Service figures, the menopause was cited in 10 cases going through employment tribunals in the first six months of 2021. 49 published employment tribunal decisions featured allegations about menopause-related detriment.

26. The incorporation of the Menopause Policy will embed and incorporate the assistance provided to staff who are going through the menopause and allow the Authority to work with those staff to address their needs appropriately.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

27. The additional cost of utilising the OH Nurse for training was met from OH budgets.

28. It is anticipated that the provisions proposed will have a minimal financial impact on the Service and all can be accommodated within existing service budgets. Officers will continue to monitor the uptake and any impact on budgets.

29. HRT prescription costs have been contained within existing Occupational Health budget lines.

Risk Management & Health and Implications

30. The proposals contained within this report will have a positive impact on Health & Safety and Welfare. It will have also have a positive impact on the organisations reputation as an employer of choice who take seriously the health and wellbeing of our female employees.

Environmental Implications

31. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

Contribution to Our Vision: ***To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.***

Our Purpose: *Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

32. The continued development of policies such as the Menopause Policy demonstrate the duty of care the Authority delivers to its employees to create an environment for its employees to continue to excel in their roles and in serving its community.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

HRT **H**ormone **R**eplacement **T**herapy

EIA **E**quality **I**mpact **A**ssessment

HM **H**is **M**ajesty’s

SLT **S**trategic **L**eadership **T**eam

OH **O**ccupational **H**ealth