

Your guide to Council Tax 2008/9

What you pay...

put recycling out ✓

take books back to library ✓

pick kids up from school ✓

Contents

	Page
Leader's letter	3
Merton's spending on services	4
Greater London Authority	6
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority	8
Environment Agency Thames Region - Flood Defence	9
Council tax reductions	10

If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address shown in the box below.

Albanian

Nese deshironi me shume informacion ne gjuhen tuaj, ju lutemi te na kontaktoni ne adresen e dhene ne kutine me poshte.

Arabic

إذا كنت ترغب في مزيد من المعلومات بلغتك، يرجى الاتصالنا على العنوان المذكور في الصندوق أدناه.

Bengali

আপনার নিজস্ব ভাষায় আরও তথ্যের জন্য, দয়া করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন নিচের বাক্সে উল্লিখিত ঠিকানাতে।

Chinese

如果您希望用您自己的语言获取更多信息，请联系我们，地址如下所示。

Farsi

اگر می‌خواهید به زبان خود بیشتر بدانید، لطفاً از طریق آدرس زیر به ما تماس بگیرید.

French

Pour tout renseignement complémentaire dans votre propre langue, veuillez nous contacter à l'adresse figurant dans l'encadré du bas.

Polish

Jeśli życzy sobie Państwu więcej informacji w swoim języku proszę się z nami skontaktować pod adresem podanym w dolnej ramce.

Punjabi

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਚਿਰ ਵੇਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਈ ਭੇਦੀ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠਲੇ ਖੇਤਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਠਿਕਾਣੇ 'ਤੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਵਾਲ ਪੁੱਛ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ।

Somali

Hadii aad u baahan tahay faahfaahin intaa kabadan oo ku soobsan afkaaka hooyo ama Af Somali fadlan lana soo xiira cinwaanka hoos ku qoran.

Spanish

Si usted desea más información en su propia lengua, por favor contáctenos en la dirección al pie del formato.

Tamil

உங்கள் சொந்த மொழியில் மேலும் தகவலைப் பெற விரும்பினால், கீழ்க்கண்ட முகவரிக்கு தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள்.

Urdu

اگر آپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دی گئی پتہ پر ہمیں رابطہ کریں۔

You can also get this information in large print, in Braille and on tape.

The Director of Corporate Services, Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

Leader's letter



Dear Resident

Merton's council is committed to providing you with value for money and that is why for the second year running we have agreed a below current inflation increase in council tax.

Band D taxpayers will pay just over £3 extra a month per household for Merton's services in 2008/2009. This 3.9% increase means that the council is actually charging residents less in real terms for Council Tax than for the past two years.

Those on lower incomes are often hardest hit by council tax rises, so, for the second year running, the Merton element of council tax has been held in line with the increase in State Pensions from April 2008.

It was a great disappointment that Merton only received an extra £1.3 million increase in our grant settlement from the government this year. Like many London boroughs this was the lowest percentage increase available and well below the national average. This has meant some hard choices have had to be made in order to balance our £145m budget, but I am pleased to say the council has managed to do so. Overall in order to achieve the level of council tax which was considered right for Merton's tax payers, the council was faced with the need to make £8.9million of savings, wherever possible by making efficiencies in back office services.

But in line with the executive's commitment to put your needs first, the council will be making available £1.4 million of extra money this year to fund growing social care costs. It will be used to cope with the further expected increase in the number of our older residents requiring council care.

So you can see that the council has faced some tough financial challenges but has also been working hard to deliver the services you want, at an affordable price. This was recognised by our independent Audit Commission score in 2007/2008 that saw the council's official rating improved from two stars to three (out of four).

Despite the modest increase in council tax, we have produced a budget that we believe will deliver high quality services and offer good value for money across the council.

Some of the highlights of the 2008/9 budget are:-

Valuing your quality of life

- £2 million for improvements to the street scene including the decluttering of streets and more rubbish bins
- The regeneration of Mitcham and Morden town centres including traffic improvements
- Money for highway improvements around the new Eastfields rail station

Putting your safety first

- Increased funding for CCTV equipment and to ensure 24 hour CCTV coverage
- More than £350,000 over 3 years for 20mph zones

Putting your children first

- Almost £1 million over 2 years on improving school meals and kitchens
- Nearly £2million for the building of a new secondary school provision for children with special educational needs

For the first time along with your council tax bill, you will have also received an A-Z guide of the council's most requested services. This is because the council recognises you want to know where your money goes and what essential local services it is used to support.

Big challenges lie ahead - the council is ambitious to do more for Merton and you, our residents.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Councillor David Williams, Leader of Merton Council

Merton's spending on services

The Council Tax

Council tax is made up of three parts.

The following shows the figures for Band D:

	2007/08	2008/09	Increase
	£	£	%
Spending on Merton's local services	1,042.66	1,082.20	3.8%
Spending on Levies	7.86	9.29	18.2%
Subtotal	1,050.52	1,091.49	3.9%
GLA precept	303.88	309.82	2.0%
Total	1,354.40	1,401.31	3.5%

How Merton pays for services:

Three main sources make up the money we plan to spend on services in 2008/2009.

These are:

	£000's	%	£/head*
Non-Domestic Rates	57,630	40	290.64
Revenue Support Grant	8,022	5	40.46
Council Tax Income	80,149	55	404.21

Total Budget Requirement 145,801 100

* based on estimated population of 198,285 in 2008 (source: DCLG)

Non-Domestic Rates, paid by businesses, are collected by local authorities and paid into a national pool. This national pool is then shared according to the number of residents each Authority has.

Government Revenue Support Grant is allocated using information on the population, social structure and other characteristics of each authority. The income raised from the Council Tax is used to fund the balance of expenditure.

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Merton has a MTFS which sets out details for the next three years. This can be viewed on Merton's website at www.merton.gov.uk/finance

Spending on services provided by Merton

Merton uses the funds that are raised from Government, businesses and the Council Tax to finance the costs of services we provide (apart from housing which is mainly financed from Rents and Government subsidies). The amounts we plan to spend on these services in 2008/09 (together with comparative information for 2007/2008) is shown below.

2007/08			2008/09			
Gross Expenditure £000s	Income £000s	Net Expenditure £000s	Gross Expenditure £000s	Income £000s	Net Expenditure £000s	
6,585	(4,681)	1,904	Chief Executive's	8,239	(5,986)	2,253
103,013	(90,421)	12,592	Corporate Services	109,765	(97,077)	12,688
149,618	(118,226)	31,392	Children, Schools and Families	163,599	(131,140)	32,459
62,293	(32,973)	29,320	Environment and Regeneration	66,410	(36,852)	29,558
78,327	(29,646)	48,681	Community and Housing	87,849	(36,219)	51,630
805	-	805	Levies	920	-	920
30,436	(18,408)	12,028	Investments and Provisions	32,592	(17,299)	15,293
431,077	(294,355)	136,722	Planned Expenditure	469,374	(324,573)	144,801
		1,800	Contribution to Reserves			1,000
		138,522	Net requirement for tax purposes			145,801

Please note that the allocation of budgets for 2008/09 is not yet finalised and some figures may change, although the overall total will not alter.

Merton's spending on services

The change in revenue spending from 2007/08 to 2008/09

	£m
Revenue Spending 2007/08	138.5
Savings in Service Provision	(8.9)
Pay and Price increases and Approved Growth	8.2
Other Corporate adjustments, capital budgets effects, etc.	7.0
Revenue Spending 2008/09	144.8
Contribution to General Fund Reserves	1.0
Net Requirement for Tax Purposes	145.8

The charge and bands

The council tax uses the Band D charge as its basis. We work out all other bands from the Band D charge. The charges, including the GLA precept, are as follows:

Band	Property value	Proportion of Band D Charge	Council Tax £
A	up to £40,000	6/9	934.21
B	£40,001-£52,000	7/9	1,089.91
C	£52,001-£68,000	8/9	1,245.61
D	£68,001-£88,000	9/9	1,401.31
E	£88,001-£120,000	11/9	1,712.71
F	£120,001-£160,000	13/9	2,024.12
G	£160,001-£320,000	15/9	2,335.52
H	£320,001 upwards	18/9	2,802.62

If you live within the area of Wimbledon and Putney Common you pay an extra £23.32 (Band D) to cover the expenses of the Commons Conservators. Including this charge, the Band D charge is £1,424.63.

Levies

Included within our spending plans are levies that we have to pay to certain bodies outside council control. These are as follows:

	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
Lee Valley Regional Park	219,455	221,664
Environment Agency Flood Defence	132,668	146,675
London Pensions Fund Authority	216,012	306,169
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators	237,081	245,573
Total Levies	805,216	920,081

Borrowing

At the end of 2007/2008 long-term borrowing is expected to be £163m.

We pay for the interest arising from this debt using the council tax, or from rents in the case of housing.

People employed

The estimated number of staff we employ (calculated on full-time basis and including teachers) for 2008/2009 is 4,241. This compares with a total of 4,275 in 2007/2008.

Introduction

The Mayor's 2008-09 budget builds on the previous seven budgets, improving London's policing, transport and fire services. This year's budget also provides sustained investment to improve the capital's environment and tackle climate change.

Efficiencies and other savings of £270 million have helped the Mayor to restrict the increase in the council tax precept to 2% or 11p per week for a band D property, below the rate of inflation.

The budget includes a further planned increase of 1,000 police officers in 2008-09. This is in addition to the 10,000 increase in uniformed officers since 2001.

Changes in council tax	£	Increase per wk
2007-08 band D amount	303.88	
Metropolitan Police Authority	3.42	7p
London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority	3.34	6p
Greater London Authority	0.15	-
Transport for London	-0.04	-
Surplus on Borough Collection Funds	-0.93	-2p
2008-09 band D amount	309.82	11p

The Mayor's responsibilities have been extended to include housing, adult skills, planning, waste, culture and sport, health, sustainable development, energy and climate change. The GLA is also now responsible for the Museum of London, for which additional funding will be received.

How the budget is funded	£m
Gross Expenditure	11,346
Fares, charges and other income	-3,901
Government grants for specific purposes	-3,661
Government grants and redistributed business rates	-2,235
Paid out of reserves (TfL)	-613
Paid out of reserves (other)	-22
Surplus in the council tax collection fund	-6
Amount met by council tax payers	908

Policing

Recorded crime has fallen for five consecutive years and the budget proposals include a net £3.9 million to develop borough partnerships in two-year deals to provide an extra 320 police officers to tackle specific community issues. There is an extra £2 million for 20 officer posts to provide more proactive resources in combating the increasingly harmful gun and gang culture and an additional £5 million to continue the roll-out of Integrated Borough Operations to provide important local information and intelligence to help deliver the best response to incidents and ensure public and officer safety.

Transport

2008 sees the beginning of the Low Emission Zone, which introduces improved emission control standards for all HGVs, coaches, taxis and buses entering the zone.

Other priorities for 2008-09 are:

- Victoria line being upgraded – a process that will end with new trains in 2009;
- all District line trains refurbished by 2009;
- DLR scheduled to introduce 55 new railcars from 2008;
- £30 million for Travel Demand Management;
- improvement programme for London Overground;
- charges on Dial-A-Ride services scrapped;
- 20% more investment in walking and cycling;
- financial incentives to boroughs to implement 20 mph zones.

Changes in spending	£m
2007-08 Budget requirement	3,061.8
Inflation	222.3
Efficiency and other savings	-270.3
Existing services and new initiatives (net of grant increases)	678.4
2008 Mayor and Assembly Elections (funded from reserves)	-11.1
Planned movements in reserves, working capital and borrowings	-532.5
2008-09 Budget requirement	3,148.6

Fire

LFEPA has achieved significant fire reduction improvements through the “prevention is better than cure” strategy. Highlights of recent performance include reductions in the number of fires, fire deaths and injuries; an increase in community safety activity and a continued fall in the number of hoax calls.

The budget for LFEPA in 2008-09 has been developed to build on these achievements and to support the aim of making London a safer city, with resilience an integral part of the budget. In addition to this the budget will support LFEPA in promoting sustainable development and in maximising the impact the Fire Authority can have on reducing pollution and harmful emissions.

Olympics

The amount to be raised through the council tax precept for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games remains at 38p per week for a band D household – the same as for each of the past two years. To raise £625 million will require £20 at band D for 7 more years and £9 in the final year, 2016-17.

Transport schemes for the Olympics are being designed to leave a lasting legacy, underpinning the regeneration of East London and providing the infrastructure to support 40,000 new homes for Londoners.

Security, safety and resilience arrangements for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are being co-ordinated by the Metropolitan Police. The costs of this and the dedicated project team at LFEPA will be met by Government.

London Youth Offer

A £79 million fund has been set up, with £20 million of the funding provided by the LDA. The purpose of the Mayor's Youth Offer is to help provide more places to go and things to do for young Londoners; provide more support for parents; and give young people new opportunities to gain new skills and raise their aspirations.

Climate Change

The Mayor's Climate Change Action Plan, published in 2007, sets the framework for the GLA group to reduce carbon emissions up to 2025, through measures to reduce non-renewable energy consumption, minimise waste and increase recycling, and promote water efficiency. In 2008 the Mayor will continue to take a leading role in the Large Cities Climate Change group. The LDA has committed £35 million over three years for the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan programmes and will expand on the existing Green Homes programme. A further £18 million over three years has been committed for the delivery of new waste and recycling facilities.

£	MPA	LFEPA	TfL	LDA	GLA	Collection fund	Total
2007-08 band D council tax precept	223.60	47.12	4.13	Nil	30.00	-0.97	303.88
Increase for 2008-09	3.42	3.34	-0.04	-	0.15	-0.93	5.94
2008-09 band D council tax precept	227.02	50.46	4.09	Nil	30.15	-1.90	309.82

The Metropolitan Police District does not include the City of London and therefore a Band D council taxpayer in the City will pay £82.80 for LFEPA, TfL and GLA.

£m	MPA		LFEPA		TfL		LDA		GLA		Total	
	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09
Gross expenditure	3,309.9	3,510.8	443.0	453.4	6,397.0	6,821.0	418.2	406.7	153.7	153.7	10,721.8	11,345.6
Specific grants	-500.4	-613.6	-9.5	-8.3	-2,598.0	-2,649.0	-418.2	-389.7	-1.5	-0.6	-3,527.6	-3,661.2
Other income	-272.8	-302.2	-19.6	-19.8	-3,397.0	-3,547.0	-	-17.0	-14.6	-15.3	-3,704.0	-3,901.3
Net expenditure	2,536.7	2,595.0	413.9	425.3	402.0	625.0	-	-	137.6	137.8	3,490.2	3,783.1
Reserves	-4.0	-	-22.4	-20.2	-390.0	-613.0	-	-	-12.0	-1.3	-428.4	-634.5
Budget requirement	2,532.7	2,595.0	391.5	405.1	12.0	12.0	Nil	Nil	125.6	136.5	3,061.8	3,148.6

More information on the budget is available on the GLA website at www.london.gov.uk (telephone 020 7983 4000).

Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority was established by an act of parliament in 1966 to regenerate, develop and manage approximately 10,000 acres of the Lee Valley, which had become largely derelict, and transform it into a unique leisure and nature conservation resource for the benefit of Hertfordshire, Essex and London.

	2007/2008	2008/2009
	£m	£m
Gross Operating Expenditure	13.9	14.1
Gross Operating Income	(5.3)	(5.3)
Net Service Operating Costs	8.6	8.8
Financing Costs – Debt servicing/repayments	0.7	0.7
– New capital investment	2.6	2.6
Total Net Expenditure	11.9	12.1

Further details on how this budget is spent and the amount each council contributes can be found at www.leevalleypark.org.uk

Environment Agency Thames Region

The Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) Regulations 2003.

The Environment Agency, as a levying body for its Flood Defence functions, under the above regulations, provides the following information:

The Thames Region is home to 12 million people. Within the region it is our job to maintain 5,200km of Main River and 193km of tidal defences. This includes operating the Thames Barrier – London’s main defence against flooding. Flood defence money is spent on the construction of new flood defence schemes, the maintenance of the river system and existing flood defences together with the operation of a flood warning system. The financial details are:

The majority of funding for flood defence comes directly from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). However, where there are schemes which do not attract central funding the Agency may seek funding from County and Metropolitan Councils, Unitary Authorities and London Boroughs in the form of a Local Levy. The Local Levy is shared on the basis of Band D Equivalentents between all contributing bodies within the Committee Area.

Changes in the gross expenditure between the years are due mainly to a £5.9m increase in Grant in Aid and a £1m increase in the programme of levy schemes in 2008/09. The total Local Levy has increased from £9m in 2007/08 to £10m for 2008/09.

Thames Regional Flood Defence Committee

	2007/8	2008/9
	£'000	£'000
Gross Expenditure	81,551	88,357
Net Expenditure	69,749	76,342
Levies Raised	9,000	10,000
Total Council Tax Base	4,904	4,952

Council Tax reductions

Valuation of properties

If you have a query about your property you should contact the Listing Officer of the Valuation Office at:

**2nd Floor, 1 Francis Grove,
Wimbledon, London SW19 4DT.
Telephone 020 8276 8600.**

Council tax was introduced on 1 April 1993. Homes were placed in bands based on house prices at 1 April 1991. A general rise or fall in prices since that date does not mean you can appeal on your banding.

Since December 1993 you can only challenge the band your property has been placed in if one of the following occurs.

- The balance between residential and business use within a property has changed.
- The property has been converted from a house to flats.
- A Listing Officer has changed a banding without a proposal having been made by a taxpayer.
- The Court has altered the band of a similar property.
- When you become the taxpayer of a property for the first time. You must make your appeal within six months of you becoming the taxpayer. You can only appeal if there has not been an appeal relating to your property before.
- There has been a significant increase or reduction in the property's value. This applies where:
 - Your property has increased in value as a result of building or alteration. Any increase in banding is put off until the property is sold. The new taxpayer then has a right to appeal against the new banding.
 - Your property has reduced in value because of demolition, changes in the physical area or an adaptation to make the property suitable for someone with a disability.

Reduction for the Disabled

If anyone needs special facilities (such as an extra room) to meet needs related to a disability, you may be entitled to a reduced bill. We may reduce the bill to that of a property in the band below.

You can only apply for a discount or relief (reduction) on your bill if you do not already have one.

Please send any claims to Corporate Services Department, Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX.

Alternatively, telephone the number shown on your bill. If your bill shows that we have given you a discount or relief and your circumstances change, you must tell us immediately. If you do not, you may face a penalty charge.

Other reductions available are Exempt Property and Council Tax Benefit – please see your council tax bill for more information.

Appeals

You can appeal against your council tax if you think your property is exempt, or that there has been a mistake calculating your bill. If you want to appeal you must tell us in writing, stating the reasons. You must continue to pay your bill while we deal with your claim. We will refund you any money you have overpaid if your appeal is successful.

If the appeal is unsuccessful we will give you details of an independent tribunal which you can refer your appeal to.

Discounts

You may be entitled to a 25% discount off your council tax bill if you are the only person (aged 18 or over) living in a property.

We work out council tax by assuming that at least two adults are living in the property. However, we do not count some people when we work out how many adults live in the property. This may allow you to receive a discount even if you do not live alone.

These are:

- Full-time students, student nurses, apprentices and youth training trainees;
- 18 and 19 year olds who are at, or who have just left, school or college;
- patients in hospital;
- people being looked after in care homes;
- people staying in certain hostels or night shelters;
- care workers on low pay (usually for charities);
- people who care for someone with a disability who is not their husband, wife, partner, or a child under 18;
- members of visiting Armed Forces and certain international institutions;
- foreign diplomats;
- members of religious communities (such as monks and nuns);
- people in detention; and
- the severely mentally impaired.

If all residents living in a property fall under one or more of the discount categories, we treat the property as being empty and give a 50% discount.

For the purpose of council tax, a 'resident' means a person aged 18 or over who has their only or main residence in the property concerned.

Therefore we do not consider people under 18 and people in any of the discount categories when we decide how much tax you should pay.

You may be entitled to a 10% discount if your property is empty and furnished. We will need to know your main residence before giving you your discount. Please note that the level of discount varies across the country as each local authority sets its own discount amount.

Exemptions

Certain categories of homes are exempt from council tax. We call them exemption classes and these are:

- Class A:** An uninhabitable property requiring or undergoing major repairs or structural alterations. Exemption can be allowed for a maximum of 12 months and the property must be unoccupied and unfurnished.
- Class B:** Empty property owned by a registered charity. Exemption can be allowed for up to six months.
- Class C:** Empty and unfurnished for six months or less. Exemption can be allowed for up to six months.
- Class D:** Empty property where liable person being in prison or detained in hospital.
- Class E:** Empty property previously occupied by a person now residing in a care home, hospital or hostel.
- Class F:** Empty property where the liable person has died or where less than six months has passed since probate.
- Class G:** Occupation prohibited by law.
- Class H:** Empty property held for a minister of religion.
- Class I:** Empty property where liable person is living elsewhere to receive personal care.
- Class J:** Empty property where liable person living elsewhere to provide personal care.
- Class K:** Dwellings left empty by a student.
- Class L:** Empty property where mortgagee in possession.
- Class M:** Students' halls of residence.
- Class N:** Occupied only by students or students and their non-British spouses, civil partners or dependants.
- Class O:** UK armed forces accommodation.
- Class P:** Person liable is a member (or dependant of a member) of visiting forces accommodation.
- Class Q:** Empty property where the liable person is in bankruptcy.

- Class R:** Empty caravan pitch or boat mooring.
- Class S:** Occupied by under eighteen year olds only.
- Class T:** Empty annexe to an occupied property commonly known as “granny annexe”.
- Class U:** Occupied by severely mentally impaired persons only.
- Class V:** Property that is the main residence of a person with diplomatic privilege or immunity.
- Class W:** Annexe occupied by dependant relative.

Discount/Exemption Warning

It is an offence to accept a discount/exemption on your bill that you are not entitled to. You are required by law to tell us within 21 days of a change, if you are no longer entitled to a discount or exemption. If you do not tell us and have no reasonable excuse it may result in a penalty of £50.00 being issued against you. If therefore your bill shows a reduction that you believe you are not entitled to, please contact us straight away.

Council Tax Benefit

If you are on a low income or income support you may be entitled to Council Tax Benefit. The amount of benefit you get depends on:

- how much money you have coming in;
- the amount of savings you have;
- your personal circumstances; and
- how much council tax you pay.

If you want to apply for benefit contact the Benefit Service at the Civic Centre or phone **020 8274 4901**.

2nd Adult Rebate

If you do not qualify for Council Tax Benefit (or do not wish to claim) you may get help if other adults (not a partner or lodger) residing in your household are on a low income, by means of a 2nd Adult Rebate.

Data Protection

Your personal information will be held and used in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. We are under a duty to protect the public funds that we administer and, to this end, may use any information we hold in relation to council tax for the prevention and detection of fraud. We may also share this information with other bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds for these purposes.