

# Your Guide to Council Tax 2006/7

Please keep this booklet



Council tax is a tax on property that helps pay for the cost of providing local services.

This booklet gives you information about how we calculate the council tax and how we spend the money.

[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)





Dear Resident,

**Council tax rise kept to 2.5% for second year running!**

Merton Council is committed to an unprecedented 'three year council tax promise'!

Last year, the Merton Council increase was limited to inflation (2.5%), this year it is 2.5% and next year it will again be 2.5%. Our council tax is now firmly in the lower half for outer London. This has been achieved through sound management of council finances, with the third highest efficiency savings in London, and by paying off £54m of old debt accumulated after 1965. We believe in passing on the benefit to residents through low council tax increases and investment in services.



**Merton Council works closely with the police to ensure safety in our streets. As part of that commitment we support:**

- Eight CCTV operators with 170 cameras on 24-hour alert.
- Street and neighbourhood wardens providing reassurance.
- ASBOs and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts to reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Dispersal areas so police can move on troublemakers.
- Ten dedicated Safer Neighbourhood police teams covering half the borough.

Merton has improved from being the eighth to the third safest London borough.

Part of the overall council tax increase this year will ensure that every ward in Merton has a Safer Neighbourhood Police Team by April 2007.

For four years, we have prioritised street cleaning, refuse collection, recycling and removing abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping. We have also developed a free graffiti removal service for residents' property. Our streets and open spaces now look much better and resident satisfaction has increased.

Merton residents care for the environment and recycled or composted 23% of domestic waste in 2005/6: one of the highest rates in London. We continue to improve, recently achieving 28% in November and have opened a new "zero waste" Reuse and Recycling Centre at Weir Road.

The council has completely reformed education in four years by abolishing middle schools and investing heavily, equivalent to £3,122 for every child. We continue to strive for improvements in standards at both primary and secondary level.

Competitive school sport is now an absolute priority with new coaching, all-weather pitches, sports halls and an athletics track. In the arts, the Nelson celebrations in October witnessed a successful new music and drama partnership involving nine schools, New Wimbledon Theatre, the Polka Children's Theatre, Wimbledon School of Art and the Merton Music Foundation. Jamie Oliver School Dinners have also taken off and we are funding an extensive programme to rebuild school kitchens, so that all children can eat freshly cooked food.

**Over the last 12 months we have also invested in services to improve your quality of life with:**

- A new library in Raynes Park
- Transformed libraries in Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden
- Better parks
- Improvements in leisure centres

There is more information about Merton's spending on services on pages 4 and 5 of this booklet.

There will be report-back sessions across the borough for all residents during the next year.

I believe that Merton Council has a strong record of progress and investment. You can be confident that your borough is well managed and looking to the future. Merton is definitely getting better!

Yours faithfully

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

**Andrew Judge, 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:

|                                     | 2005/06         | 2006/07         | Increase    |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
|                                     | £               | £               | %           |
| Spending on Merton's local services | 981.85          | 1,007.17        | 2.6%        |
| Spending on Levies                  | 7.44            | 6.85            | -7.9%       |
| Subtotal                            | 989.29          | 1,014.02        | 2.5%        |
| GLA precept                         | 254.62          | 288.61          | 13.3%       |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>1,243.91</b> | <b>1,302.63</b> | <b>4.7%</b> |

## How Merton pays for services:

Four main sources make up the money we plan to spend on services in 2006/2007.

These are:

|                                 | £000's         | %          | £/head |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------|--------|
| Non-Domestic Rates              | 50,160         | 23         | 258.11 |
| Revenue Support Grant           | 9,683          | 4          | 49.83  |
| Council Tax Income              | 73,363         | 33         | 377.51 |
| Dedicated Schools Grant         | 90,220         | 40         | 464.25 |
| <b>Total Budget Requirement</b> | <b>223,426</b> | <b>100</b> |        |

Note: Schools are now funded by a new Dedicated Schools Grant.

Local councils collect Non-Domestic Rates from businesses and pay them 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. As from 2006/07, schools are now funded through a ringfenced Dedicated Schools Grant. We then use money we collect from residents (the council tax) to make up the rest of our budget.

## Spending on services provided by Merton

Merton uses the money we raise from the Government, businesses and the council tax to pay for the services we provide (apart from housing which is mainly paid for by rents and government subsidies). The amounts we plan to spend on these services in 2006/2007 (together with comparative information for 2005/2006) is shown below.

|  | 2005/06           |                |                 |   | 2006/07           |                |                 |
|--|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
|  | Gross Expenditure | Income         | Net Expenditure |   | Gross Expenditure | Income         | Net Expenditure |
|  | £000s             | £000s          | £000s           |   | £000s             | £000s          | £000s           |
|  | 5,380             | 4,210          | 1,170           | Chief Executive's                       | 3,536             | 2,767          | 769             |
|  | 94,074            | 82,933         | 11,141          | Corporate Services                      | 102,054           | 89,968         | 12,086          |
|  | 147,325           | 22,859         | 124,466         | Children, Schools and Families          | 155,014           | 24,052         | 130,962         |
|  | 66,407            | 33,831         | 32,576          | Environment & Regeneration              | 67,610            | 34,444         | 33,166          |
|  | 78,264            | 37,569         | 40,695          | Community and Housing                   | 84,372            | 40,501         | 43,871          |
|  | 763               |                | 763             | Levies                                  | 726               |                | 726             |
|  | 33,088            | 34,563         | (1,475)         | Investment & Provisions                 | 33,917            | 33,571         | 346             |
|  | <b>425,301</b>    | <b>215,965</b> | <b>209,336</b>  | <b>Planned Expenditure</b>              | <b>447,229</b>    | <b>225,303</b> | <b>221,926</b>  |
|  |                   |                | <b>1,900</b>    | <b>Contribution to Reserves</b>         |                   |                | <b>1,500</b>    |
|  |                   |                | <b>211,236</b>  | <b>Net requirement for tax purposes</b> |                   |                | <b>223,426</b>  |

Please note that the allocation of budgets for 2006/07 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 2005/06 to 2006/07

|   | £m           |
|---|--------------|
| Revenue Spending 2005/06  | 211.2        |
| Savings in Service Provision  | (8.4)        |
| Pay and Price increases and Approved Growth   | 15.0         |
| Other Corporate additions, Superannuation Revaluation, capital budgets effects, funding changes | 4.1          |
| <b>Revenue Spending 2006/07</b>   | <b>221.9</b> |
| Contribution to General Fund Reserves   | 1.5          |
| Net Requirement for Tax Purposes**  | 223.4        |

\*\* includes schools expenditure of £90.220m funded by Dedicated Schools Grant

## 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 as follows:

| Band | Property value    | Proportion of Band D Charge | Council Tax £ |
|------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| A    | up to £40,000     | 6/9                         | 868.42        |
| B    | £40,001-£52,000   | 7/9                         | 1,013.15      |
| C    | £52,001-£68,000   | 8/9                         | 1,157.89      |
| D    | £68,001-£88,000   | 9/9                         | 1,302.63      |
| E    | £88,001-£120,000  | 11/9                        | 1,592.11      |
| F    | £120,001-£160,000 | 13/9                        | 1,881.58      |
| G    | £160,001-£320,000 | 15/9                        | 2,171.05      |
| H    | £320,001 upwards  | 18/9                        | 2,605.26      |

If you live within the area of Wimbledon and Putney Common you pay an extra £22.24 (Band D) to cover the expenses of the Commons Conservators. Including this charge, the Band D charge is £1,324.87.

## Levies

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

|  | 2005/06<br>£   | 2006/07<br>£   |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Lee Valley Regional Park                     | 208,632        | 213,639        |
| Environment Agency<br>Flood Defence          | 132,521        | 83,253         |
| London Pensions Fund<br>Authority            | 192,372        | 196,040        |
| Wimbledon and Putney<br>Commons Conservators | 229,095        | 233,169        |
| <b>Total Levies</b>                          | <b>762,620</b> | <b>726,101</b> |

## Borrowing

At the end of 2005/2006 long-term borrowing is expected to be £171m.

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) for 2006/2007 is 4,517. This compares with a total of 4,096 in 2005/2006.

## Introduction

The Mayor of London's sixth budget concentrates on safer stations, safer neighbourhoods and a safer London. There are resources to ensure every neighbourhood in London gets a dedicated beat police team, extra British Transport Police to patrol our overground stations and more fire rescue crews.

The budget also delivers more transport improvements, a package of measures to improve Londoners' environment and quality of life, and support for the delivery of the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

This will cost a two person household in a Band D property an extra **65p** a week; **38p** of this is the financial contribution to support the cost of staging the 2012 Games that has been agreed with the Government.

The overall percentage increase in the GLA precept is **13.3** per cent of which **7.8** per cent is for the 2012 Games financial contribution.

| How the budget is funded                           | £m           |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Gross expenditure</b>                           | <b>9,644</b> |
| Fares, charges and other income                    | -3,367       |
| Government grants for specific purposes            | -3,241       |
| Government grants and redistributed business rates | -2,108       |
| Paid out of reserves                               | -96          |
| <b>Amount to be met by council tax payers</b>      | <b>832</b>   |

The £832m raised from council tax represents 9 per cent of total spending and requires a Band D amount of £288.61.

| Changes in council tax       | £             | Increase per wk |
|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 2005-06 Band D amount        | 254.62        |                 |
| 2012 Games                   | 20.00         | 38p             |
| Safer Neighbourhood teams    | 11.04         | 21p             |
| Other policing               | 2.95          | 6p              |
| <b>2006-07 Band D amount</b> | <b>288.61</b> | <b>65p</b>      |

## 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

Staging the 2012 Games will leave a lasting legacy across the whole of the capital. London will gain hugely in terms of infrastructure, new sporting facilities, business opportunities, tourism, foreign investment and the largest urban park in Europe for 150 years.

The budget includes the first contribution from council tax payers towards the delivery of the 2012 Games. The Band D amount is **£20** and the amount raised in 2006-07 will be £57.7m. It is estimated £550m will be raised from £20 at Band D for nine years and £5 for the final year. To raise £625m, if necessary, this will require £20 at Band D for ten years and £9 for the final year.

For every £1 raised from council tax, £7 comes from other sources including the National Lottery, the International Olympic Committee, business sponsorship and ticket sales.

## Transport

In addition to funding for operational improvements to London Underground, London Buses and Docklands Light Railway, Transport for London will fund key Olympic 'background' schemes which were a major factor in the successful bid. These include:

- Extension of the East London Line to Dalston, West Croydon and Crystal Palace;
- New Docklands Light Railway links to Woolwich and Stratford International;
- Improved services on the North London Line to provide a higher capacity into Stratford Regional station (the new terminus for the North London Line);
- East London Transit and Greenwich Waterfront Transit.

## Changes in spending

The main changes in spending that underpin the budget are shown below:

| Changes in spending  | £m             |
|--|----------------|
| 2005-06 Budget requirement   | 2,972.6        |
| Safer Neighbourhood teams  | 48.1           |
| 2012 Games   | 57.7           |
| Inflation  | 201.5          |
| Efficiency and other savings   | -267.5         |
| Existing services and new initiatives<br>(net of grant increases)    | 12.9           |
| Changes to police & fire pensions and<br>other financing adjustments | -85.6          |
| <b>2006-07 Budget requirement</b>                                    | <b>2,939.7</b> |

## Policing - Safer Neighbourhoods

Every local community in London will have its own dedicated policing team by the end of April. The new teams will have four officers - a sergeant, a constable and two police community support officers - and will be based in all wards where there is not already a Safer Neighbourhood team. This means all London's 625 wards will have these teams two years earlier than the original April 2008 deadline. An extra constable and police community support officer will be added over the next 12 months, bringing each up to the full strength of a Safer Neighbourhood team by April 2007.

## Policing - Safer Stations

There is extra funding for an additional 89 British Transport Police officers. These extra officers will be mobile and visible, and will deal with robbery, violent crime and knife crime hotspots at overground stations. The funding will also return to full strength the 670 officers directly responsible to Transport for London who work exclusively on London Underground and the Docklands Light Railway.

## Policing - Counter Terrorism

An increase in government grant of £30m for 2006-07 will be fully spent on strengthening the police service's capability to counter the threat of terrorism.

## Fire

The budget reflects the continuing modernisation of the fire brigade and continuing improvements to the safety and security of all Londoners. There is funding for six extra response vehicles to respond to major incidents such as terrorist attacks and other major catastrophic incidents. There are also more resources for action on preventing fires and targeted community safety initiatives.

| £   | MPA           | LFEPA        | TfL         | LDA        | GLA          | Collection fund | Total         |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 2005-06 Band D council tax precept        | 196.28        | 44.15        | 6.99        | Nil        | 8.18         | -0.98           | 254.62        |
| Contribution for Olympics                 | -             | -            | -           | -          | 20.00        | -               | 20.00         |
| Increase for 2006-07                      | 14.54         | 1.48         | -2.83       | -          | 1.14         | -0.34           | 13.99         |
| <b>2006-07 Band D council tax precept</b> | <b>210.82</b> | <b>45.63</b> | <b>4.16</b> | <b>Nil</b> | <b>29.32</b> | <b>-1.32</b>    | <b>288.61</b> |

*The Metropolitan Police District does not include the City of London and therefore a Band D council taxpayer in the City will pay £77.79, an increase of £19.45.*

| £m                                | MPA            |                | LFEPA        |              | TfL         |             | LDA        |            | GLA         |              | Total          |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                   | 2005-06        | 2006-07        | 2005-06      | 2006-07      | 2005-06     | 2006-07     | 2005-06    | 2006-07    | 2005-06     | 2006-07      | 2005-06        | 2006-07        |
| Gross expenditure                 | 3,113.9        | 3,267.0        | 449.4        | 431.2        | 5,059.0     | 5,393.0     | 392.0      | 422.5      | 68.8        | 130.3        | 9,083.1        | 9,644.0        |
| Specific grants                   | -222.8         | -425.7         | -6.6         | -9.6         | -2,161.0    | -2,383.0    | -392.0     | -422.5     | -2.2        | -2.2         | -2,784.6       | -3,243.0       |
| Other income                      | -380.8         | -391.6         | -34.2        | -17.5        | -2,807.0    | -2,946.0    | -          | -          | -10.6       | -10.2        | -3,232.6       | -3,365.3       |
| <b>Net expenditure</b>            | <b>2,510.3</b> | <b>2,449.7</b> | <b>408.6</b> | <b>404.1</b> | <b>91.0</b> | <b>64.0</b> | <b>Nil</b> | <b>Nil</b> | <b>56.0</b> | <b>117.9</b> | <b>3,065.9</b> | <b>3,035.7</b> |
| Use of reserves                   | -22.0          | -24.0          | -5.2         | -24.6        | -71.0       | -52.0       | -          | -          | 4.9         | 4.6          | -93.3          | -96.0          |
| <b>Budget requirement 2005-06</b> | <b>2,488.3</b> | <b>2,425.7</b> | <b>403.4</b> | <b>379.5</b> | <b>20.0</b> | <b>12.0</b> | <b>Nil</b> | <b>Nil</b> | <b>60.9</b> | <b>122.5</b> | <b>2,972.6</b> | <b>2,939.7</b> |

Changes in financial arrangements mean figures for 2005-06 and 2006-07 are not directly comparable. On a like for like basis there is a 3.6 per cent increase in the budget requirement. More information on the budget is available on the GLA website at [www.london.gov.uk/gla/budget/](http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/budget/) (telephone 020 7983 4000).

# Flood risk management in your area



ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY

Our aim is to protect and improve the environment. One of the ways we do this is by working with others to encourage sustainable development. This means looking at the way we use land, air and water. The way we manage flood risk is a major part of this.

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.

It will never be possible to prevent flooding entirely - what we can do is manage floods. The aim of flood risk management is to reduce the risks of flooding from rivers and the sea to people, property and the natural environment. We do this by providing warnings and effective defences where economically viable. We issue flood warnings directly to the public, media, emergency services and local authorities for flooding from main rivers and the sea. Our warning system Floodline Warning Direct (FWD) has four levels of warning with clear definitions:

- **Flood Watch** - Flooding possible. Be aware! Be prepared! Watch out!
- **Flood Warning** - Flooding expected affecting homes, businesses and main roads. Act now!
- **Severe Flood Warning** - Severe flooding expected. Imminent danger to life and property. Act now!
- **All Clear** - Issued when flood watches or warnings are no longer in force.

You can access up-to-date flood warnings in your area via our website, [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or from floodline on **0845 988 1188**.

In the event of a river flooding emergency call our incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60**.

| Thames Region -<br>Flood Defence finance figures<br>(all figures are in £'000s) | 2005/6 | 2006/7 |
|---|--------|--------|
| Gross Expenditure   | 86,578 | 82,410 |
| <b>Less:</b>  |        |        |
| Income (including Government Grant-in-Aid)                                      | 75,841 | 77,316 |
| Transfers to/(from) Balances  | -1,841 | 538    |
| Levies Raised   | 8,896  | 5,632  |

## Changes in the Levies Raised 2005/2006 to 2006/2007 attributable to:

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| a) Inflation                                       | 3,445         |
| b) Changes in quantity of services                 | -5,805        |
| c) Increase in Government funding/<br>Other income | 1,475         |
| d) Changes in utilisation of reserves              | -2,379        |
| <b>Total change in levies raised</b>               | <b>-3,264</b> |

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.

## Budget/Levy Changes – 2005/2006 to 2006/2007

|   | £000  | £000          |
|---|-------|---------------|
| <b>Levied from local taxpayers in 2005/06</b> |       | <b>11,192</b> |
| Inflation                                     |       | 304           |
| Service Developments                          | 932   |               |
| Revenue Savings                               | (899) |               |
| Net Growth                                    |       | 33            |
| Levied from local taxpayers in 2006/2007      |       | 11,529        |

|   | 2005/2006   | 2006/2007   |
|---|-------------|-------------|
|   | £m          | £m          |
| Gross Operating Expenditure                 | 11.9        | 12.4        |
| Gross Operating Income                      | (4.2)       | (4.6)       |
| Net Service Operating Costs                 | 7.7         | 7.8         |
| Financing Costs - Debt servicing/repayments | 0.7         | 0.8         |
| New capital investment                      | 2.8         | 2.9         |
| <b>Total Net Expenditure</b>                | <b>11.2</b> | <b>11.5</b> |

# 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.

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.

**If you make an appeal you must continue to pay your bill until we settle the appeal.**

## 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

There are certain categories of homes that are exempt from council tax. For a list of the exemptions please see your council tax bill.

## 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**.

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## Making work for yourself?

### **Do you worry about paying your bill on time? Then pay by Direct Debit!**

Advantages include:

- you can choose out of three monthly payment dates (the 8th, 18th or 28th) under the assurance of the Direct Debit guarantee;
- you can choose to pay over 12 months instead of 10;
- you will help keep down the costs of collecting council tax.

### **Interested?**

It is easy to set up Direct Debit. Simply complete the mandate form attached to your council tax bill. Alternatively, you can phone our staff on **020 8274 4904** and take advantage of our Fast Track Direct Debit Service.

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## Council Tax and Benefit Enquiries

# You can now contact us 24 hours a day by telephone, email or via our website

### Telephone

Simply call this local charge number at any time:

**08459 400 170**

You will hear a simple menu listing all the information that is available on the service.

If you want a short cut to the most popular sections, you can use Hot Keys to take you straight to the information you need.

At the start of your call you will be asked if you know the Hot Key number of the service you require - simply press the relevant number on your phone from the list below.

### Council Tax Enquiries

- Hot Key 1** How we set this year's council tax amount and where we spend your money.
- Hot Key 2** Valuation Bands; exempt dwellings; discounts and disabilities; what to do if you think your bill is wrong; and a full explanation of your council tax bill.
- Hot Key 3** To request a form / tell us about:
- moving in or out of a property in the borough;
  - applying for a discount, including single person's allowance;
  - a change in your circumstances; and
  - applying for an exemption for an empty property.
- Hot Key 4** How you can pay, and applying for Direct Debit.
- Hot Key 5** Help if you are having difficulties paying your bill.
- Hot Key 6** If you have received a reminder letter, summons or notice of a bailiff visit.

### Benefit Enquiries

- Hot Key 7** To ask us to send you a application form for benefit.
- Hot Key 8** To ask us to send you a 'Change in Circumstance' form.
- Hot Key 9** You disagree with a decision we have made and want us to look at your claim again, or you wish to appeal.
- Hot Key 0** To check on the progress of a claim.

### Email

Simply send a blank email (you don't have to type a message) to: **[mertonrb@latestinfo.co.uk](mailto:mertonrb@latestinfo.co.uk)**

We will immediately send you a full list of information, advice, forms and services that you can access through email. You then simply pick the subject that you want from the list and follow the on-screen instructions to get the information or service.

### Website

Visit our website at **[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)** and follow the links to Council Tax or Benefits.

## Ten most frequently asked questions

### 1. Why has my bill gone up?

Council tax is a tax on property that helps pay for local services. Every year we set a budget for the amount of money we need and the Mayor of London sets the Greater London Authority (GLA) precept.

### 2. What is the GLA charge, and what does it cover?

The GLA group charge covers the money they need for areas such as the GLA, London Fire and Emergency Planning, Transport for London, Met Police Authority and London Development Agency.

### 3. What services does my money pay for, and can I get a reduction if I don't use them?

The services the money pays for are listed in previous pages of this leaflet. They include local services such as social services, schools and refuse collection. There are no reductions for people not using these services.

### 4. What is my banding and why is it so high?

Your property was placed in a band based on an "open market" assessment of its value at 1 April 1991. The Listing Officer of the Valuation Office decides the band of your property and places it on a valuation list in one of eight valuation bands (A to H).

### 5. Can I appeal against my banding, and how do I?

Yes, you can challenge the band your property is in. You should write to the Listing Officer at 2nd Floor, 1 Francis Grove, Wimbledon, London, SW19 4DT. You can phone the Listing Officer on **020 8276 8600**. Your appeal must be within six months of you becoming the taxpayer for a property. A general rise or fall in house prices is not grounds for an appeal on your banding.

### 6. Can I claim a discount, and how do I apply for one?

This will depend on your circumstances. There are details about discounts on pages 10 and 11 of this booklet and on the council tax web pages. The most common discount we give is for people living on their own. You can claim this by calling **020 8274 4901**. You can also claim discounts by applying in person at the civic centre, visiting [www.merton.gov.uk/counciltax](http://www.merton.gov.uk/counciltax) or by sending an email to [local.taxation@merton.gov.uk](mailto:local.taxation@merton.gov.uk)

### 7. Can I change my Direct Debit date?

Yes, however there are only three dates you can choose from: the 8th, 18th or 28th of the month.

### 8. Can I take longer than ten months to pay?

You can pay by 12 instalments if you are a Direct Debit payer. We will give you 12 instalments or less, depending on the date we process your application.

### 9. I haven't got my bill yet - can you send me a copy?

For the new financial year your bill should arrive by 1 April. If you need another copy please phone us on **020 8274 4904**.

### 10. Can I claim any benefit to help pay my council tax?

Yes, Council Tax Benefit is available to individuals and couples who are on low incomes and have limited savings. To claim the benefit you must be liable for paying the tax and normally live in the property you are liable for.

You must continue to pay the full amount of council tax while we assess your benefit claim. For an application form or for more information please visit the civic centre in person, phone our contact centre on **020 8274 4903** or visit [www.merton.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.merton.gov.uk/benefits)

# Merton's Revenues and Benefits Customer Standards

## Customer charter standards

The Merton Revenues and Benefits Service are committed to providing excellent customer service in 2006. Below are the standards of customer service that you can expect from us.

## When you phone us

- We will answer your call within five rings.
- Your call will be handled by experienced Revenues and Benefits officers.
- We provide a textphone service for people with hearing and speech difficulties.
- If English is not your first language we will arrange for an interpreter.
- We will check and confirm who you are.
- If you need to speak to another department we will either transfer you or give you their contact details.
- We will treat you with courtesy and respect at all times. In return we expect our staff will be dealt with in the same way. We will end calls from people who are aggressive or abusive.

## When you email us

We will:

- Reply within one working day to acknowledge that we received it.
- Provide a full response within 15 working days.
- Use clear and plain language.
- Tell you:
  - who replied to your email
  - their job title and department
  - their contact details.

## When you write to us (including complaints)

We will:

- Reply within 15 working days of receiving it.
- Tell you if we cannot provide a full response within 15 days. For example, we may be waiting for another organisation to supply us with information.
- Use clear, easy to understand and jargon free language.
- Scan all your claims, documents and letters on to our computer system in one day.

## When you visit Merton Link

We will:

- Greet you when you arrive and decide who is the best person to help you.
- Issue you with a ticket and arrange for knowledgeable staff to see you within 30 minutes.
- Provide equal access to Revenues and Benefits services if you have a disability or special needs.

## How are we improving?

We have made significant improvements in 2005/6. The Government has set challenging targets for all local authority Revenues and Benefits Services, for example:

- 36 days to process new claims.
- 9 days to process changes of circumstances.

This year we have exceeded them and are in the top quarter of all London boroughs.

In 2004/5 our revenues section collected:

- 97% of the total amount of council tax.
- 98.5% of the total amount of business rates.

This put us in the top quarter of similar outer London boroughs for the amount of local tax collected. This year we are again on track to beat last year's totals.

We are also meeting our challenging targets for providing our services online and increasing the accessibility.

You can now:

- Contact us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- Make payments online.
- View the balance of your account online.
- Complete many forms online.

## Have your say?

If you would like to make a comment, complaint or compliment please complete a form by:

Telephoning our Customer Service Officer on

**020 8545 3573**

Downloading a form from our website:

**[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)**

Sending us an email to either

[local.taxation@merton.gov.uk](mailto:local.taxation@merton.gov.uk) or

[housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk](mailto:housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk)

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## What are our 2006/7 targets?

### Revenues

We have challenging targets for collecting council tax and business rates in 2006/7.

We aim to:

- Collect more than 99% of the business rates.
- Collect over 97% of the council tax due.

### Merton Benefits Service

We aim to improve by aiming higher than the Government's targets. Our targets for 2006/7 will be:

- To process new claims in an average of 25 days.
  - To process changes in circumstances in 5 days.
  - Process 98% of all claims accurately after getting all the relevant information.
-

# Council Telephone Numbers

Please make your enquiry by  
calling our contact centre on

**020 8274 4901**



Out of hours Emergency Line: 020 8543 9750



**You can pay even less council tax if you qualify  
for disablement relief, a discount or an exemption.**

# Cutting council tax

To find out how...

**Call 020 8274 4904**

Visit Merton Link or our website for discount or exemption claim forms.  
You can also get this information in other languages, large print, in Braille and on tape.

[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)



Cover photos, starting top left to right:  
Windmill - Wimbledon  
Tamworth Manor School  
Cannizaro Park - Wimbledon  
Merton Link - Morden  
Raynes Park Library  
Mitcham Clock Tower

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