



## A message from the Leader of the Council **Councillor Ross Garrod**

### Annual update for Merton's local businesses

Dear Business Owner,

I am writing with news about how your council is supporting local businesses and residents in Merton with the cost-of-living emergency, and our plans for investing in the future of our borough; building a better Merton together.

I know times are tough, with high energy bills, high inflation, high mortgage rates and rents pushing up day-to-day costs. Too many of our valued local businesses are finding it difficult, with inflation having hit its highest rate since the 1980s.

#### **Reducing bills for Merton businesses**

Locally, we've been helping businesses to save on their energy bills. The Wimbledon Business Climate Challenge – a project that is run in partnership with the Wimbledon Business Improvement District and the Mayor of London – is providing extensive no-cost support to businesses to save on energy. Businesses in and around Wimbledon can apply for support that saved participants of the 2021 scheme on average £8300 over nine months.

We're also working with University College London and local circular economy group, The Wheel, to establish the Net Zero Innovation Programme – a pilot project in Morden investigating how SMEs can reduce waste and become more resource efficient. The project will also investigate opportunities for reducing the energy usage of local SMEs, given the cost-of-living emergency. We've also introduced the Workery in Mitcham, a free-to-use workspace for local start-ups and entrepreneurs looking to get their business off the ground.

For more information on these projects, please visit [merton.gov.uk/HelpForBusiness](https://merton.gov.uk/HelpForBusiness)

#### **Your Business Rates bill**

Business rates are set by central government, and so we unfortunately have no say in the levels that you pay. However, whilst we can't stop your bill going up, we can offer you support if you think that you'll struggle to pay it.

If you've had difficulty paying your business rates during the last year or anticipate having difficulty in the coming year, we will see if your monthly payments can be deferred. You can fill in a form online at [merton.gov.uk/hardshiprelief](https://merton.gov.uk/hardshiprelief) or speak to one of our team on **020 8545 3751** to discuss in confidence an alternative payment option.

We can also check if your business qualifies for Small Business Rate Relief. You can apply at [merton.gov.uk/smallbusinessrelief](https://merton.gov.uk/smallbusinessrelief) to see if you are entitled to this discount.

## Helping you to help low-paid employees

Nobody has felt the squeeze more than our borough's lowest-paid workers in recent times. That's why I am proud that Merton Council has been accredited as a London Living Wage employer, putting more money in the pockets of our lowest-paid employees and contractors.

Across Merton, more than 16,000 people still earn less than the London Living Wage (£11.95 per hour) – that's 16,000 people who are earning less than the amount that's needed to meet life's day-to-day costs, according to the Resolution Foundation. We want to change this and, with your help, make Merton a Living Wage borough.

I recognise that now is a difficult time for me to ask employers to increase their wage bill, so we're taking action to support you to do the right thing. We're currently looking at ways that we can give employers direct financial support for doing the right thing by their employees, and we'll be in touch with all businesses soon to give more details.

For more information on how to become accredited, visit: [livingwage.org.uk](https://livingwage.org.uk).

## Investing in our future

Using business rates money wisely is a role we take extremely seriously, and I wanted to outline some of the ways that our new budget invests in the future of our borough. Investing in nurturing a sense of civic pride. Investing in building a sustainable future. Investing to create a borough of sport.

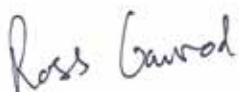
We will:

- Invest in maintaining and improving local roads across the borough
- Invest in cleaner streets, building on the improvements made during 2022
- Invest more in improving our high streets and shopping parades and planting more trees
- Invest in improving cycleways and cycling infrastructure
- Invest in delivering the first of 400 energy-efficient affordable homes on council-owned land
- Expand our electric vehicle charging programme, making Merton one of the most EV-friendly boroughs in London
- Expand our School Streets programme, protecting Merton's children and young people from poor air quality
- Develop plans for a running track in east Merton, following the successful refurbishment of the running track at Wimbledon this year
- Update and refurbish all our Multi-Use Games Areas in our parks across the borough

The council has been under intense pressure with energy bills, rising costs and inflation. With another real-terms cut in government funding, we have had to work hard to balance the budget while protecting crucial services and making the essential investment our borough needs.

The decisions we have made both to support residents during the cost-of-living emergency, and in setting our new budget – protecting crucial services, investing in the future of our borough, paying residents a decent wage – reflect our values as a council and our vision for the future. Building a better Merton together.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Ross Garrod**  
**Leader of the London Borough of Merton**

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