



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

Annual update for Merton's Council Tax payers

Dear Resident,

I am writing with news about how your council is supporting 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 people are struggling and facing difficult choices this winter between heating or eating.

We have done what we can to support residents during the cost-of-living emergency, and have carefully managed the council's budget to keep our cost to you down.

However, the Government has said it expects us to raise Council Tax by the maximum amount possible and has adjusted the amount of funding it gives us to run services accordingly. This means a 3% increase on Council Tax, and a 2% increase on the Social Care precept (the funding specifically set aside to provide social care for the elderly and the vulnerable). It is unfair that the Government is forcing local residents to plug this funding gap.

I know any rise is unwelcome, especially in these difficult times. I don't want to implement the Government's Council Tax rise, but at a time of rising costs, a national crisis in social care, and with so many residents dependent on the crucial services we provide, they leave us no choice.

Merton residents already benefit from a well-run council. Our average Council Tax bills are lower than in neighbouring Sutton, Richmond and Kingston. But to limit the impact of the Government's Council Tax rise, I am pleased to say that we are the only London council to give a 1% discount for the majority of taxpayers. This discount has been automatically applied to your Council Tax bill if you live in a Band A–D property, so there is no need for you to do anything. This means that yet again, Merton has the lowest Council Tax bill in outer south west London.

Merton already has one of the most generous Council Tax Support schemes in the country – help with Council Tax bills for those on the lowest incomes – but we are increasing the funding for this and the support we can give to those hardest-hit by rising costs.

Last year, we acted quickly to help those most in need by setting up a £2 million Cost-of-Living Fund. This included a £60 winter payment to those residents on the lowest incomes; more than £10,000 in supermarket vouchers; and free school meals over the school holidays.

We have also given funding to support local foodbanks, provide debt advice services, and help for people to make their homes more energy efficient. Plus, our libraries were opened as warm spaces for people worried about heating their homes, providing activities, information and support.

If you're feeling worried about the rising cost of living, please don't stay silent. Contact us – we're here to help. You can find out more in the enclosed leaflet or online at merton.gov.uk/CostOfLiving

Another way we are helping is by investing £8 million to make sure we pay all our staff and contractors the London Living Wage. I am proud that Merton Council has been accredited as a London Living Wage employer, and we will be encouraging businesses in our borough to do the same; putting more money in people's pockets and making Merton a Living Wage Borough.

To build on this work, our new council budget sets out how we are investing 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.

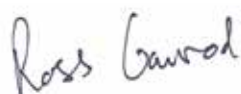
We will:

- 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

PS The way we vote is changing and from 4 May you will need to show photo ID to vote. To find out more visit www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id

London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

☎ 020 8545 3424

🐦 @RossGarrod

✉ leaders.office@merton.gov.uk