



A message from the Leader of the Council Councillor Ross Garrod

Annual update for Merton's business owners

12 March 2024

Dear business owner,

I am writing with news about how your council is supporting local businesses and what we are doing to build a better Merton.

Each year, the council faces difficult choices as we work to balance the budget, but this year has been more challenging than most. We're facing significant financial pressures – our costs are up, revenues still haven't recovered from the pandemic, and there has been a sharp increase in demand for our services. These challenges are compounded by the reductions that we've seen to our Government funding – down by over £17 million since 2010.

These difficulties are being felt around the country, and indeed, several councils have had to effectively declare bankruptcy in recent times – leading to serious consequences for their residents. Thankfully, because of our prudent management of the council's finances, we're not in that position, but the ongoing low levels of Government funding will continue to pose a risk to all councils.

I know that many of these pressures have been felt by our business community too, which is why we are determined to provide you with practical support that will help your business to not only survive but thrive.

An update on Business Rates

The amount you are charged in Business Rates is set by the Valuation Office (a Government agency) and central government, so we unfortunately have no say on 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 anticipate that you may have difficulty paying your Business Rates this year, you may be eligible for hardship relief. Visit merton.gov.uk/hardshiprelief or speak to one of our team on **020 8545 3751** to discuss the options available to you in confidence. Your business may also qualify for Small Business Rate Relief. You can apply at merton.gov.uk/smallbusinessrelief to see if you are entitled to this discount.

Financial assistance to become a Living Wage accredited employer

We believe that everyone deserves a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. That's why we are launching a new Business Rates Grant Scheme – to help more businesses in Merton to become accredited London Living Wage employers in 2024. This scheme will provide a one-off grant for organisations which are Living Wage Foundation accredited – or which are seeking to be accredited – to help offset those costs.

The scheme forms part of our £1 million boost to the Cost of Living Fund, which provides a wide range of help for people who are struggling to make ends meet. Organisations that don't pay Business Rates are also welcome to apply to ensure as many employees as possible benefit under the scheme.

Sign up to our email business newsletter – merton.gov.uk/newsletter – to be the first to hear about the grant when it launches and for further information, such as eligibility criteria.

Getting value for money for you

At the heart of our budget is the principle that we need to deliver good local services whilst securing the best value for money for taxpayers. We're always looking to maximise the value of every pound we spend in Merton – getting the best deal for residents and local businesses and ensuring that we are spending money wisely.

To achieve this, we are implementing a commercial approach to the way we spend taxpayers' money. We're attracting new talent to the council to ensure fair and transparent procurement, help our services be as efficient as possible, and attract private investment into the borough – including through match funding schemes.

We've also safeguarded our finances through the sale of our wholly owned risk prevention and compliance company, CHAS Ltd. Following successful growth and management of the business, we sold it in 2023, using the proceeds to pay debts and to invest in government backed bonds, which will give us more money to invest in services.

Investing to build a better Merton

Despite the financial challenges we face, we've still been able to invest in what matters to the people and businesses of Merton. Enclosed with this letter is a leaflet showing just some of the ways in which we are improving the borough we call home, and making it an even better place to shop and do business, but as important as those achievements are, they are just scratching at the surface of the good work that our budget is enabling.

This year we will:

- breathe new life into our town centres and high streets through targeted investment, including match funding to draw private investment into Morden
- prioritise improving transport infrastructure, including more EV charging, and improved walking and cycling infrastructure, to help people get around
- keep Merton clean by improving waste collections and street cleaning, and cracking down on fly tipping
- maintain and improve roads and paths across Merton so everyone can travel around Merton with ease and safety
- continue to use our Civic Pride Fund to support community groups, creating a borough where people feel proud to live, work and do business, and
- begin work on building the first new council homes in Merton in a generation

Like you, we take financial management seriously because we understand it is vital to securing a well-run organisation that delivers for local people – especially in times of hardship. The decisions we have taken have allowed us to not only safeguard the council's finances, but also to protect frontline services, ensure value for money, and invest in what matters to Merton residents.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader of the London Borough of Merton

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