



A message from the Leader of the Council
Councillor Ross Garrod

**Annual update for Merton's
Council Tax Support recipients**

12 March 2024

Dear resident,

I am writing with news about how your council is protecting frontline services for Merton residents and how we are continuing to help those struggling through the cost of living crisis. We're two years into the cost of living crisis now and it is still very difficult for many of our residents to keep on top of day-to-day costs. We are continuing to do everything we can to support everyone in Merton through these difficult times.

However, the council is providing this support against a challenging backdrop of rising costs, a drop in our income since the pandemic, and a sharp increase in demand for our services. These challenges are made worse by the reductions that we've seen to our Government funding – down by £17.1 million since 2010. But, none of that changes our commitment to look out for those struggling the most.

Keeping your bills down

The Government provides us with some of our funding for the coming financial year. They calculate this on the assumption that we increase Council Tax by 4.99 per cent. I don't want to have to make this increase, but if we refuse to go through with this rise, we would have to make cuts to your frontline services that we are working hard to protect – and so we have been left with no choice.

The good news is that, as someone on our Council Tax Support scheme, you will be protected from this rise. We've made the decision to expand the scheme – which is already one of the most generous in the country – meaning that the majority of you receiving this letter will not pay Council Tax at all.

If you pay a reduced bill, the scheme means that you will not face the 4.99 per cent increase – as long as your circumstances remain the same, any slight change in your Council Tax contributions should be offset by an increase in other benefits you receive. This means that you are still paying less than you would in neighbouring boroughs like Sutton, Kingston, and Croydon.

Support is available in Merton

In my letter last year, I wrote about our Cost of Living Support Fund that we set up to provide practical help to residents who were struggling to make ends meet. But the cost of living crisis continues, which is why I'm delighted that we have added more to the fund to expand our work and help more people.

Part of the fund is being used to support some of our borough's foodbanks – please do use these if you need to, details can be found on the webpage mentioned below. Another cost that I know a lot of people are struggling with is energy bills, so we're supporting partners like Thinking Works and initiatives such as Warm & Well to give practical advice on how to reduce bills, as well as inviting people into our free and heated Warm Spaces so they can save at home during the colder months.

For those in severe need, there is direct financial help available. Our Local Welfare Support Scheme is here for you if there is a risk to your health and safety or if you need help to resettle or remain in Merton. Our partners at Wimbledon Guild also have emergency one-off grants to help with the cost of food, electricity, household appliances, and school uniforms.

There is also free, independent expert advice available for a whole range of issues from benefits, debt, and employment support, to housing, and health and wellbeing. We have many partners who can be contacted individually, or you can come to one of our cost of living events in our libraries where most of them come together to offer their expertise at one time and in one place. These events supported more than 2,500 residents last year and we are looking forward to welcoming residents to our next event at the Merton Civic Centre in Morden on 27 April.

For more information on the events, any of the support mentioned above, and much more, visit merton.gov.uk/CostOfLiving or call **020 8066 4086**.


Investing to build a better Merton

Support with the cost of living is one of my key priorities, but there is so much more to do to build a better borough that everyone can be proud to call home. Here are some of what our budget will allow us to do over the next year:

- keep Merton as one of the safest boroughs in London by investing in our 24-hour CCTV network
- begin work on the first new council homes in Merton in a generation
- safeguard our Adult Social Care and Children's Services for the most vulnerable in our borough
- breathe new life into our town centres and high streets through targeted investment
- 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, and
- look after and improve our much-loved parks and green spaces so they remain the envy of London.

We take financial management seriously because it is vital to securing a well-run council 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 and maintain our cost of living support, 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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