



A message from the Leader of the Council
Councillor Ross Garrod

Annual update for Merton's
Council Tax payers

12 March 2024

Dear resident,

I am writing to let you know what Merton Council will be doing next year to improve your neighbourhood and build a better borough for everyone. Each year, we face 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 careful management of the council's finances, we're not in that position, but the continued low levels of Government funding will continue to pose a risk to all councils.

An update on Council Tax

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.

We have again kept Council Tax lower than neighbours in Sutton, Kingston, and Croydon. However, I know that any rise can present real problems. That's why we're expanding our Council Tax Support scheme, which is already one of the most generous in the country. The scheme will reduce bills for around 10,000 Merton households.

I know that there are many residents who may not be eligible for Council Tax Support but are still struggling with the cost of living. That's why we set up a Cost of Living Support Fund, which is making a big difference to people's lives by providing food support, benefits and debt advice, emergency grants, employment, health and wellbeing support, and free school holiday activities and meals, among other measures.

We are also continuing our cost of living events which supported more than 2,500 residents last year. For information on these events and the wide range of support available, visit merton.gov.uk/CostOfLiving or call **020 8066 4086**.

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 local people.

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're also reviewing our contracts to get value and good terms and conditions for those that work for our suppliers – the majority of whom live in Merton. Our programme of upgrading contracts to write in a commitment to paying the London living wage shows that we're committed to delivering services fairly for those that use them, those that deliver them, and those that pay for them.

Investing to build a better Merton

Despite the financial challenges, we've still been able to invest in what matters to residents. Enclosed with this letter is a leaflet showing just some of the ways in which we are improving our borough and looking after those in need, 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:

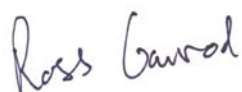
- keep Merton as one of the safest boroughs in London by investing in our 24-hour CCTV network
- begin work on the first new council homes in Merton in a generation
- safeguard our Adult Social Care and Children's Services for the most vulnerable in our borough
- breathe new life into our town centres 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 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 are also prioritising improving walking, cycling and electric vehicle infrastructure, cleaning up the air we breathe, and tackling climate change to build a sustainable future for generations to come. We are investing in community groups – from older people's lunch clubs to activity groups for adults with learning difficulties – to nurture a sense of civic pride so that everyone feels proud of our borough. We are also building on our borough's great sporting heritage by upgrading local facilities, as well as funding free and low-cost opportunities for everyone to get active – many of which you can see on our brand new Activity Finder:

getactive.io/area/merton

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, ensure value for money, and invest in what matters to Merton residents.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader of the London Borough of Merton

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

☎ 020 8545 3424

🐦 @RossGarrod

✉ leaders.office@merton.gov.uk