Merton takes action on cost-of-living support for residents

Your pull-out-and-keep guide to local services
The start of spring also heralds the beginning of the new financial year and, earlier this month, the full council agreed the council’s budget for 2023/24. Like many residents, we have been under unprecedented pressure to balance our budget, with soaring energy costs, rising bills and inflation driving up the cost of providing vital services that so many people rely on.

This is on top of a significant loss of income from fees and charges – a legacy of the pandemic, as well as yet another real-terms cut in Government funding, together with the expectation that the council will increase council tax by 3% from April, with an additional 2% for the adult social care precept.

However, as one of the first councils to declare a cost-of-living emergency, we are determined to do what we can to support our residents who are struggling to make ends meet. So, we are giving the majority of residents – all those living in band A-D properties – a one-off 1% discount on their council tax bills. This means Merton’s council tax is lower than in neighbouring Sutton, Kingston and Richmond. This is in addition to our £60 winter payment to those residents on the lowest incomes through Merton’s council tax support scheme, one of the most generous in the UK.

In partnership with organisations across the borough, we have been doing everything we can to support vulnerable residents through our cost-of-living campaign and you can find information about the support available in this issue.

The rising cost of living is also a concern for our employees, many of whom live in the borough. So, last month, I was delighted to announce that the council has achieved Living Wage accreditation and we are investing £8m over the next four years to ensure that our contractors are paying the London Living Wage to their staff who are providing services for the council.

One of our most prominent services is waste disposal and last month we made the decision to bring street-cleaning services back in house, when our current contract ends in 2025, whilst continuing to contract out bin collections.

Clean streets are another step towards nurturing civic pride – making us all proud to live here. Neighbourhoods across the borough will also benefit from our Civic Pride Funds, with £1.3m being used for a range of projects to improve local areas, plus £5m that has been awarded to charities and community organisations to support our most vulnerable residents. This is the largest amount of money that the council has distributed to the voluntary sector in many years and I’m looking forward to seeing these exciting projects develop over the coming months.

To keep up to date with council news, please sign up to receive the weekly *My Merton* e-newsletter at merton.gov.uk/newsletter

Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader, London Borough of Merton

Sign up to Ross’s email
merton.gov.uk/newsletter
New adult learning strategy

The council’s Cabinet has approved the adoption of an Adult Learning strategy for the next four years, which will commit Merton to providing high-quality and sustainable adult learning that will improve social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes for residents. The strategy is underpinned by the council’s priorities: that every adult has access to a good or an outstanding education; that it offers green skills courses; and that it helps to increase the number of residents in good well-paid jobs. Merton will deliver this strategy by commissioning provision from the best providers in their field and will use evidence-based approaches to inform our delivery. It aims to reduce inequalities across the borough by focusing investment on the most socially and economically disadvantaged.

The Adult Learning team saw 1,836 people enrol on 362 courses during the academic year 2021–22, and was rated Good in its last Ofsted inspection, with inspectors praising how “leaders and managers ensure that learners benefit from high-quality courses.” Last July, the service was awarded a Quality Mark as part of the Mayor’s Skill Academies in Digital Skills, one of only 25 organisations across all fields in the capital to be recognised with the prestigious award.

find out more and enrol on a course starting after Easter merton.gov.uk/adultlearning

Trustying neighbours

Merton is one of the most trusting places in England, according to the Good Neighbours survey of more than 42,000 people that was carried out by Onward. Researchers asked people across England whether they were always or usually trusting of other people or if they were always or usually careful. The net difference between the two indicates how trusting the people in the area are, and Merton scored +32%, one of the highest in London.

New playground

The Mayor of Merton, Councillor Joan Henry, and Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah were joined by Friends of Colliers Wood and i2vende staff to open the new playground in Colliers Wood Rec, which is shared with Singlegate Primary School. The playground is open after school each weekday and all day on Saturday and Sunday and during the school holidays.

Cracking down on car crime

Safer Neighbourhood Teams are carrying out a series of events aimed at making residents’ cars safer by marking catalytic converters. The theft of these devices has soared in recent years, with many cases believed to be unreported.

Using kits supplied by Merton Neighbourhood Watch, officers marked more than 45 cars at the first event in Raynes Park last month, with more events planned this year.

find out more www.mertonnhw.co.uk

Windrush 75th anniversary

As the council prepares to mark this important milestone in June, members of the Windrush Generation are being urged to check if they or any family members are eligible to apply for compensation.

Those who travelled from Commonwealth countries to help rebuild the UK after the Second World War are described as the Windrush Generation, a term named after the MV Empire Windrush ship, which brought 492 passengers from the Caribbean to the UK on 22 June 1948. Changes to immigration policy over several decades left members of the Windrush Generation without access to healthcare or social housing, while others lost their jobs or were wrongfully detained or deported. The people affected may be able to make a claim from the Windrush Compensation Scheme.

find out more merton.gov.uk/windrushcompensation
Secondary school place offers

Every Merton family who applied for a secondary school place for their child, starting this September, has received an offer. A record number of these families received an offer of a Merton school, reflecting a high level of confidence in the borough's secondary schools, all of which are rated Outstanding or Good by Ofsted.

All offers were sent to parents on national offer day on 1 March. The data shows that nearly 90% of Merton children have been offered a place in one of their top three preferred secondary schools. The official Government measure for last year shows children progress better in Merton secondary schools than in all but one local authority area in the whole country.

Voter ID

The way we vote is changing. From 4 May, all voters in England will need to show photo identification before being allowed to vote at polling stations in local government elections, UK parliamentary by-elections and recall petitions. From October, the rule will also apply to UK general elections.

If you don’t have accepted photo identification, such as a passport, a driving licence or a Freedom Pass, you can apply for a free voter identification document, which is known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

There are no scheduled elections in Merton until May 2024.

find out more merton.gov.uk/voterid

COVID-19 jabs

If you haven’t yet had your first or second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, it’s not too late to pop into a walk-in clinic. In line with guidance from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, 12 February marked the end of the national Autumn Booster campaign and was also the final day that 16- to 49-year-olds who are not considered at risk, and who have only had a primary course were able to get a booster.

find out more merton.gov.uk/coronavirus

Review of public toilets

The provision of public toilets meets a fundamental need, yet the subject is hardly ever discussed. Our Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel would like to hear about how the provision of public toilets in Merton affects people in their daily lives, especially the elderly and those with health conditions requiring more frequent visits to the toilet. You can get involved by completing our short survey by 4 April 2023 and the results will be used to review and improve the provision of public toilets in Merton.

find out more merton.gov.uk/consultations

MERTON NET ZERO TOGETHER

We’re committed to a sustainable future – Merton Council has set targets to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 as a council and by 2050 as a borough.

We’ve committed £2m since 2022 to fund:

- installation of up to 500 lamp column EV charge points
- connecting residents with funding to improve home energy efficiency
- supporting the Climate Action Group with community carbon reduction projects including Merton Garden Streets, Energy Matters and The Wheel
- help for businesses to retrofit properties
- launching Merton’s School Climate Network and Charter
- measuring the impact of all council decisions against our climate agenda

find out more merton.gov.uk/netzero
Keeping Merton informed

Highest ever customer satisfaction rates for libraries

Results from the latest customer satisfaction survey have revealed that 100% of residents are satisfied with library services, and 96% of residents rate library services as very good or good.

More than 1,600 residents took part in the customer satisfaction survey in October, with 98% saying that they would recommend their library to someone else, and 94% rating library opening hours as very good or good.

This adds to welcome news for Merton libraries over recent months, including the introduction of extended opening hours, using new door access technology at Raynes Park, Colliers Wood, Pollards Hill and West Barnes libraries; confirmation of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation status, with £357,000 in funding to be provided over the next three years to invest in cultural opportunities; and a Communication Technology Excellence in Libraries Award, for the fifth year running.

Headteacher recognised with New Year Honour

Celia Dawson of Cricket Green School in Mitcham, was awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the King’s New Year Honours list.

Mrs Dawson, who has been head of Cricket Green School for 22 years and helped create Mitcham Town Community Trust, which she chairs, was recognised for “outstanding and exemplary lifetime services to Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs”. Mrs Dawson described her work as “the best job in the world”.

Download the Merton Local app

The Merton Local app is connecting residents with their local high streets and businesses with new customers. If you run a business in the borough, sign up today.

Businesses list their details free of charge and can offer special deals or exclusive discounts to app users. Residents can download the app and browse, book and buy from businesses across the borough.

Whether you need a restaurant recommendation, a plumber or details about that independent shop you’ve been planning to visit, it is all in Merton Local.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Ordinary people was the theme of January’s international day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. An event took place at the civic centre to provide a moment of reflection and was attended by faith and community leaders, the Wimbledon Synagogue choir and the Mayor of Merton, Councillor Joan Henry, pictured with guest speaker Gabriel Stein from Holocaust education charity Generation2Generation.

Community forums

These are free meetings where you can discuss a range of issues that will then be followed up by relevant organisations.

Wimbledon – Wednesday 22 March, 7.15pm, Mansel Road Centre

Raynes Park – Tuesday 25 April, 7.15pm, Raynes Park Library

You can book appointments, make reservations and order products online for collection or delivery and there is also a chat feature that enables you to communicate directly with businesses about any queries. Merton Local also has events listings, so if you’re looking for inspiration for a night out, something to do at the weekend, or need a fun activity to entertain the kids, there is plenty to choose from.

Find out more merton.gov.uk/communityforums
Keeping Merton informed

Restaurant temporarily closed after infestation

A fast-food restaurant was shut down for 10 days after a customer spotted a cockroach in the serving area while ordering food.

Environmental health officers visited Morley’s, 215a Manor Road, Mitcham, in November after a complaint from a customer who had seen a cockroach walking up the wall of the premises near the service counter.

It was soon apparent that there was a widespread German cockroach infestation throughout the premises, as all stages of cockroaches from nymphs to adult cockroaches were found in numerous places in the kitchen.

Officers served a hygiene emergency prohibition notice to immediately close the premises and prevent the sale of food to the public. They then successfully applied to Wimbledon Magistrates’ Court to obtain an order requiring the premises to remain closed until the public health risk had been removed.

The premises re-opened on 24 November, following a deep clean, an extensive pest control treatment and the disposal of a large amount of equipment that was providing shelter to the cockroaches.

Preventing violence against women and girls

The council has launched a three-year strategy to help prevent all forms of violence, particularly domestic abuse, against women and girls. The council is working in partnership with the police and agencies across the borough on the strategy, which has five key priorities: to raise awareness and implement coordinated partnership working; to prevent through early intervention; to support victims; to hold perpetrators to account; and to improve the safety of women and girls.

Competition winners raise hate crime awareness

The winners of a poster competition to promote hate crime awareness were invited to meet the Mayor of Merton, Councillor Joan Henry, and show her their designs.

The competition was held to mark a year since the launch of the Stop Hate UK telephone helpline in Merton. The three winners are Yin Leung, aged seven; Arwin Jai Jakkula, aged seven and Ruby Jemmett-Higgins, aged 10. They were invited to the Mayor’s Parlour at Merton Civic Centre with their families.

The Stop Hate Line is open 24 hours a day every day of the year on 0800 138 1625. The helpline is also available by text message on 07717 989 025 and by email at talk@stophateuk.org.

Top marks for car parks

Twelve of Merton Council’s car parks have had their Park Mark accreditation re-awarded following an inspection by the Metropolitan Police and the British Parking Association.

The award of Park Mark shows how the council is successfully minimising crime and the fear of crime in its car parks through the achievement of high standards in lighting, signage, cleanliness and surveillance.

As part of the council’s project to modernise the borough’s parking infrastructure, plans are already in place to renew the signage and tariff boards in council car parks, including the Park Mark badge. Work will also take place at the two other council-run car parks to bring the facilities there up to the Park Mark standard this year.

In February, two Wimbledon car parks, in Hartfield Road and on The Broadway, were resurfaced and 17 new payment machines have been installed in car parks across the borough. These offer drivers the option to use both chip insert or contactless payment, using Visa and Mastercard cards, as well as Apple Pay and Google/Android Pay. They also still accept coins, and motorists can also pay via their mobile phone.
Keeping an eye on Merton

Other London boroughs have been taking a close look at Merton’s CCTV network, monitored from a control room in the civic centre, which helps to keep us all safe as we go about our daily lives.

Since the beginning of November, Merton’s network of CCTV cameras has captured 75 incidents, ranging from assault to fly-tipping, and has provided evidence that was subsequently passed on to the police.

This included a suicidal man who was seen by a CCTV operator who sent assistance that saved his life, as well helping to prevent what could have escalated into a serious assault on a woman at 4am in Wimbledon in November.

The operator involved in the latter situation has been nominated for a commendation by the borough police commander. These incidents and many others, stretching back years, show why the borough’s CCTV system is the envy of other local authorities in London.

The 24/7 service is operated from the civic centre, where operators proactively watch more than 200 cameras stationed across the borough. The biggest concentration of cameras is within the town centres and on housing estates.

Our CCTV team works closely with partners, such as the police, Safer Merton, Clarion Housing and Love Wimbledon to make sure that borough residents feel safe wherever they are.

There are two types of cameras: permanent cameras located in the busiest parts of the borough; and temporary cameras that can be deployed at short notice in hot spots that require special attention, such as new fly-tipping locations.

Merton operators have a direct link to the police, via the police radio, allowing them to communicate without unnecessary delay, which makes a huge difference when there are incidents that require immediate attention.

The CCTV team is very proud that their assistance results in preventing harm, violence or antisocial behaviour. However, CCTV on its own does not solve all these problems, it simply forms an essential part of multi-agency communication.

2023–24 will be a crucial year for Merton CCTV. There is a planned upgrade of all the public space cameras that is due to finish by the end of March 2024. It is a huge project that includes upgrading Merton’s fibre-optic network and installing new high-definition cameras in place of the current analogue devices, which are, on average, at least 10 to 15 years old.

The upgrade will enable Merton CCTV to produce higher-quality evidence for partner enforcement agencies.

It will cost £1.3m, but will generate savings on fibre rental for years to come, and, more importantly, Merton will have one of the best and most effective CCTV systems in the country.

The upgrade will also allow Merton to extend the CCTV coverage and offer the CCTV services to new partners across the borough.
Ringing the changes to deliver cleaner streets

The council will bring street-cleaning services back in-house from 2025 following extensive consultation with communities.

We know street cleaning is a top priority for our communities. That’s why the council’s Cabinet has decided that, from April 2025, all local street-cleaning services will be brought back in-house and delivered directly by us, your local council. The decision was made after determining that the council needed “full control and flexibility” over service delivery in the future.

Last October, the council’s Cabinet made the decision not to renew the current contract for bin collections and street cleaning across the borough when it finishes in 2025. Since then, work has been taking place to look at the options, and listening to your views on how we can improve services. This is why, at the same time street cleaning is brought back in-house in 2025, we will launch a new contracted service for bin collections.

By making these changes, the council will have more control and flexibility over cleaning schedules and service levels.

**Timeline**
- **March 2023**: The council will start two processes – one to start building our in-house street-cleaning service, and another to begin procurement of a new bin collection contract.
- **April 2025**: New services will start.

**Consultation with residents**

The decision follows a six-week consultation on the future of waste services in October 2022.

The consultation showed that overall, satisfaction with bin collections is increasing, and people are generally happy with the service they get. However, satisfaction with street cleaning has declined consistently since the contract was put in place.

By making these changes to our services, the council will have more control and flexibility – enabling us to rebuild a waste service based on the needs of our community that meets the environmental challenges we face and that keeps Merton clean.

**Improvement to services**

Working with Veolia, we’ve made a lot of improvements over the past year – including the introduction of overnight patrols and investing in new street-sweeping vehicles to build our resource. We have also been listening to the feedback from the consultation, and in the next few months, we will be improving collections from flats above shops and piloting our new mobile recycling centre, called Garth Road on the Road, which will bring the services we offer at Garth Road closer to you. But we want to make even more improvements, and our new waste service will allow us to do that.

The Cabinet’s decision on 20 February, follows the Cabinet’s earlier decision in October 2022 not to renew its existing contract when it expires in March 2025.

The existing contract is managed through the South London Waste Partnership comprising Merton, Kingston, Croydon and Sutton, and currently delivers both services – street sweeping and bin collections.

Watch: Visit our YouTube channel to watch Councillor Ross Garrod, Leader of Merton Council, and Councillor Natasha Irons, Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change explain the street-cleaning and waste collection decision.

Stay up to date with the latest council news, including the future of the waste service, by subscribing to our weekly *My Merton* e-news at merton.gov.uk/newsletter or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
Residents across the borough have been affected by the rising cost of energy and food. For low-income families and those claiming benefits, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get by.

**Families**

**Food vouchers for children**  
To help with the rising cost of food, you could access free school-holiday food vouchers for the Easter break if your child receives free school meals. You will receive £30 per child to spend in the supermarket. To find out more, visit: merton.gov.uk/freemeals.

**Grants for school uniforms**  
If you need help to pay for food, gas and electricity, replace essential household appliances, or even buy school uniforms, our partners at Wimbledon Guild can offer you a one-off grant. For more information, visit: www.wimbledonguild.co.uk/grants.

**Help with childcare costs**  
For parents who need help with the cost of childcare, support is available. Whether you have toddlers or teens, you can find out more by visiting www.childcarechoices.gov.uk.

**Holiday and food clubs**  
Keep the kids happy with activity clubs during the school holidays. As the Easter holidays approach, Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) clubs are available, providing fun activities and nutritious meals to primary and secondary school children in Merton. They are free for children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. Some also offer paid-for places for other children and young people. For more information, visit: merton.gov.uk/fun-food.

**Tiny ones**  
Merton Growbaby changes the lives of children and parents in the borough by providing high-quality clothing and equipment for babies and children, as well as other support based on people’s needs. From baby toys and books to clothes, feeding equipment, nappies, wipes and more, Merton Growbaby has plenty of supplies in stock. They are also looking for volunteers to help out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Find out more www.mertongrowbaby.co.uk.

**Free activities in libraries**  
Merton Libraries run events for children and families throughout the year. On March 18 at 10am, you can enjoy Storytime for SEND children at Wimbledon Library, and it’s also worth keeping an eye out for Rhymetime at Mitcham and Morden libraries through the spring. The libraries run movie clubs and family film screenings, body-conditioning classes and yoga, and even Lego and puzzle clubs.

For inspiration about library activities that will keep the whole family entertained, visit: merton.gov.uk/libraries.
Merton’s Food Response Network is helping more people than ever

The network, which includes the council and is chaired by Sustainable Merton, one of the Community Fridge Network partners, supports residents living in food poverty.

In late January, Sustainable Merton’s Community Fridge in Morden helped more than 150 people in a single week, their busiest period ever. “Over the last three months, the number of people needing help has continued to rise,” explains Jude King, Community Fridge Manager. “It’s not just due to the cost-of-living emergency though. It’s also because we now have two permanent members of staff who are increasing food supplies and generating more publicity for the Fridge and the wider network. It’s a food waste project as much as it is about food poverty.”

Merton Council has recently allocated £100,000 to the Community Fridge Network partners including Sustainable Merton, Commonside Community Development Trust, Polish Family Association and Merton Community Transport to grow capacity further to meet demand. However, the supermarkets have started discounting food that’s near the end of its shelf life earlier in the day to encourage shoppers to buy it, rather than giving it away. “Unfortunately, this is reducing what the stores can donate,” Jude continues. “Despite this, in November alone, we gave out over three tonnes of surplus food that was near or on its best-before date.”

Nearly half of the 15 million tonnes of food thrown away in the UK every year is safe to eat. The Community Fridge at Morden Baptist Church on Crown Lane hopes to reduce some of that wastage. It complements the borough’s existing foodbanks, such as Wimbledon Foodbank, by redistributing food without any qualification requirement or voucher.

If you no longer have the means to buy essential supplies, you can contact your local Fridge Friends by emailing communityfridge@sustainablemerton.org.

Cheap but still cheerful

To keep the cost of your weekly shop as low as possible, avoid buying pasta, crisps, bread, chips and rice because the prices of these foods are still increasing. Instead, you could try potatoes, minced beef, cheese, pizza, broccoli, spinach, cabbage, kale and sausages at prices which have remained relatively low. It’s also worth remembering that fresh fruit and vegetables (preferably not pre-prepared) are still reasonably affordable and are much healthier than processed foods.
Cost-of-living payments

The Government has recently announced that over eight million people on eligible low-income benefits will receive three cost-of-living payments worth a total of £900 from spring 2023 to spring 2024. Another eight million pensioners will be entitled to an extra £300 on top of their winter fuel payments. More than six million disabled people will also be entitled to a one-off payment of £150. If you’re eligible, you won’t need to apply and you’ll be paid in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits. To find out more, visit www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment.

Recycle, re-use and save

Sustainability

With spring approaching, you might be thinking about giving your home a clear out by getting rid of things you no longer need. Before throwing stuff away, please consider whether anything can be recycled or repurposed. This can reduce the impact of waste on the environment and may even help you get some cash for your trash. With the cost of living still rising, someone else could easily benefit from your unwanted items.

Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre

If your items are in a clean and re-usable condition, take them to the Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre, where they will be checked and offered to other people.

Charity shops

Visit your local charity shop to donate unwanted items like clothes, toys, gadgets and more. If they are in good condition, take them to your local shop during opening hours (please don’t leave goods on the street when the shops are closed) and they can be re-sold to support good causes.
Preloved
You can use the Preloved website to sell unwanted items or offer them for free using the website’s freeloved feature. There are no listing or sellers’ fees so this is a cheap way to give things to other people. For more information, visit www.preloved.co.uk.

Facebook Marketplace
Facebook Marketplace is an online market that you can access if you have a Facebook account. The marketplace connects local buyers and sellers of all sorts of items. You can list your pre-loved toys, clothes and pretty much anything else and get some money for items that are in good condition.

Local Facebook groups
Groups on Facebook bring people together based on their hobbies, interests, professions and locality. Having connected with your local community, you can often sell or exchange items that you no longer need.

The Wheel
If you’re thinking of throwing out something that can be repaired and re-used, The Wheel Merton helps residents to be more sustainable. They even run Repair Cafés where broken household items can be saved and repurposed. To find out more, visit: www.thewheelmerton.org.

Why buy when you can borrow?
If you’re giving your house or garden a spring spruce and you need tools or other equipment that you may not be able to afford to buy, check out The Library of Things at Morden Library. You can borrow useful items for jobs around the house, like cleaning, DIY and gardening, so you won’t need to pay full price for something you only need once or twice.

You can affordably rent most items for £10 or less and save 25% with a concession rate that is available to anyone who would find it helpful. It cuts down on household clutter and waste and gets you more involved in the community, and you’re being kinder to the environment. To find out what they have in stock, visit: www.libraryofthings.co.uk/morden.

Please take care when buying, selling or exchanging items online. For more information about online safety, visit www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/shopping-online-securely
Balancing the budget

As we start the new financial year, the council, like many residents, is facing unprecedented pressure to balance our budget, with soaring inflation, increasing contract costs and energy-bill hikes. In addition to this, we have had our income cut by reduced funding from the Government and the loss of revenue from fees and charges, which have still not recovered since the pandemic. This has meant a lot of tough decisions to ensure that the services that residents depend on are run as efficiently as possible. However, as one of the first councils to declare a cost-of-living emergency, we remain committed to doing everything we can to help residents who are counting the cost of rising prices.

More than £22m is being invested into providing vital cost-of-living support to Merton residents following agreement of the council’s annual budget on 1 March.

Almost £1m will be spent to offer a council tax discount to residents living in band A–D homes – reducing their rise from the 5% required by Government to 4% locally.

Another £11m will be spent to fund the highest available level of council tax support, lifting nearly 7,000 residents out of council tax payments.

And £8m will be invested over four years to ensure that frontline workers across the borough, including home carers, will be paid a London Living Wage to put more money in their pockets each month.

We have already distributed £2m from our Cost-of-Living Fund to support the most vulnerable people in our community.

This includes £200,000 for Citizens Advice Merton to run debt-advice services in our libraries, which have also opened their doors to welcome people into their warm spaces; providing food vouchers for the holidays for pupils who receive free school meals; plus £100,000 for Sustainable Merton and the Community Fridge Network to help those forced to choose between heating and eating during the winter. We’ve also given £100,000 to community groups who are supporting residents in financial need with emergency assistance, including the Commonside Trust, the Dons Local Action Group and Carers Support Merton. The Polish Families Association was given £25,000 by the council to provide essential provisions to newly arriving Ukrainian refugees. If you are concerned about your finances, visit our cost-of-living webpage to find out more about the support available at merton.gov.uk/costofliving.

£3.1m libraries

Living Wage accreditation

The council has become a Living Wage accredited employer. This means that as well as paying all our employees and agency workers at least the London Living Wage – something we’ve been doing since 2013 – we’ve put a plan in place to ensure all our contractors are also paid at least the London Living Wage or the Real Living Wage if the work is carried out outside London. We’ve set aside £8m over the next four years to update our contracts with them as they come up for renewal.

An example of this is one of our biggest contracts, worth more than £56.8m over five years for care workers. Last month, our Cabinet agreed to make it a requirement that companies providing services under the Future Homecare Arrangements pay the London Living Wage to all their staff working on the contract.

£8m over four years to boost the wages of our contractors’ staff to at least the London Living Wage
Caring for the elderly and supporting adults of all ages who are disabled or have learning difficulties to live as independently as possible is an important part of the council’s work.

Since 2016, the Government has allowed local authorities that provide adult social care to charge an additional precept on residents’ council tax. This can be up to 2% extra on the council tax bill and does not need to be ratified by residents in a referendum.

You will see the charge displayed separately on your council tax bill, but it will be collected at the same time as the rest of your council tax.

The money raised by this precept is ring-fenced so that it can only be spent on adult social care provision.

The funding is spent on services for the most vulnerable people in our borough. It enables older people to live independently in their own homes or in sheltered or supported housing.

The precept also funds residential and nursing care homes and helps to pay for home care. We commission around 8,400 hours of home care a week to help residents who need support with personal care, including bathing and dressing and other essential tasks around the home.

In order to be able to recruit and retain the staff required, in February, the council’s Cabinet agreed to ensure that care workers employed by our contractors are paid at least the London Living Wage, including for travel time between care visits, as a term of Future Homecare Arrangements, one of the council’s biggest contracts.

It isn’t just older people who receive social care. The council provides services to residents with learning disabilities, autism, mental health conditions and physical disabilities. We also help to safeguard adults of any age with care and support needs to protect people from abuse.

The council also cares for the carers, supporting relatives and families to care for their loved ones through peer support networks and carers’ information programmes and services.
Balancing the budget

Investing in the future of our borough

This year’s budget reflects the council’s ambitious plans to create a Borough of Sport, nurture civic pride and work towards a sustainable future.

**Building a sustainable future**

Merton is a place that more people want to call home and this year, thanks to funding included in our budget, the first council-led home-building programme in 40 years will begin. Ten sites have already been identified and plans are being developed to build 400 affordable and sustainable new homes by 2026.

We also want to put Merton on the map for having an extensive network of on-street electric-vehicle charging points – with a target of 500. Additionally, we are improving our cycling infrastructure to encourage residents to make more journeys by bike or on foot.

As one of the greenest boroughs in London, we are aiming to increase our tree canopy by 10% by 2050. This year, we will be planting a further 3,000 trees, following the completion of one of our biggest tree-planting years ever, with 10,000 trees planted since March last year. Looking after our environment is a key part of nurturing civic pride – making people proud to live here in Merton.

**Civic pride**

We will be investing in improving our high streets and local shopping parades to encourage residents to support their local businesses, many of which are family-run firms or small independent traders.

To strengthen our partnerships across the community, we are investing more than £6m from our two Civic Pride Funds in more than 40 initiatives, which were announced earlier this year. As well as the £1.3m for neighbourhood projects, which will help to revitalise local landmarks and bring the community together to take part in sporting and cultural activities, a further £4.9m is being invested in our thriving voluntary sector. We are collaborating with a range of inspiring organisations over the next three years, particularly those with a focus on reducing inequalities, supporting older people and assisting residents who are living with disabilities.

The pandemic and the cost-of-living emergency have demonstrated what a strong sense of community and civic pride we are nurturing here in Merton and we are dedicated to continuing to work in partnership with the groups that help us support our most vulnerable residents.
A guide to key council services

2023–2024

merton.gov.uk
Parking permits
Buy, renew or change a permit.

Planning
Find and view planning applications, apply for planning permission and get planning advice.

Libraries
Renew items, download free ebooks and magazines, search for new releases and join the library.

Schools
Apply for a school place.

Council tax
Pay your bill, check your account, tell us you’ve moved and apply for discounts or exemptions.

Waste
Book a bulky waste collection or report a missed collection.

For a full list of online services, go to merton.gov.uk/doitonline

Keeping in touch with the council
Subscribe to receive our email news. Be the first to hear about the latest news, events and services, plus emergency alerts and updates.
Sign up: merton.gov.uk/newsletter

@Merton_Council
@mertoncouncil
whatsoninmerton
youtube.com/mertoncouncil

The borough’s quarterly magazine My Merton is also available at merton.gov.uk/mymerton

Adoption (Adopt London)
adoptlondon.org.uk
adoptionALS@southwark.gov.uk
020 7525 1746

Adult learning
merton.gov.uk/adultlearning

Adult social care
merton.gov.uk/adult-social-care
020 8545 4388 (9.30am–1.30pm)

Benefits advice
and local welfare
merton.gov.uk/benefitsadvice
welfarebenefitsteam@merton.gov.uk
lwss@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4908 (9am–1pm)

Blue Badge parking permits
merton.gov.uk/bluebadge
concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4990 (11am–3pm)

Bulky waste collections
merton.gov.uk/bulky
020 8274 4902

Cemeteries
merton.gov.uk/cemeteries
020 3876 8806

Childcare and early years
merton.gov.uk/childcare
fsd@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 5300

Children’s social care
merton.gov.uk/social-care
CandFhub@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 4226/7
Out of hours 020 8770 5000

Comments, compliments and complaints
merton.gov.uk/complaints
complaints@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3060

Committees and meetings
merton.gov.uk/committee
democraticservices@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3616

Conservation areas
merton.gov.uk/conservation_areas
conservation.areas@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3041

Council tax
merton.gov.uk/counciltax
local.taxation@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4904

Council tax support
merton.gov.uk/cts
housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4903

Councillors
merton.gov.uk/councillors
Conservative 020 8545 3396
Labour 020 8545 3424
Liberal Democrats 020 8545 4770
(Tuesday–Thursday 8.30am–2.30pm)
Merton Park Ward Independent Residents 020 8545 4026

Education welfare services
merton.gov.uk/educationwelfare
020 8545 4021

Electoral services
merton.gov.uk/voting
020 8274 4901

Emergency information
Information about emergencies and emergency plans affecting Merton residents or businesses.
merton.gov.uk/emergency
civilcontingencies@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4901 or 020 8545 3476

Events
Find out about council events or, if you are running a community event, you can advertise it for free on our online events calendar.
merton.gov.uk/events
events@merton.gov.uk
Family Services Directory
Information and support on parenting, childcare, health and children’s activities.
☞ merton.gov.uk/fsd

Fostering
☞ merton.gov.uk/fostering
☞ fostering@merton.gov.uk
☞ 0800 073 0874

Fly-tipping
Report fly-tipping on public roads and pavements online.
☞ merton.gov.uk/flytipping
☞ 020 8274 4902

Freedom of Information
☞ merton.gov.uk/foi
☞ foi@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 4634

Freedom Passes for disabled people
☞ merton.gov.uk/freedompasses
☞ concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8274 4990 (11am–3pm)

Freedom Passes for older people
☞ londoncouncils.gov.uk/ freedom-pass
☞ 0300 330 1433 (Monday to Sunday 8am–8pm). Calls charged at local rate

Garden waste collection service
☞ merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste
☞ 020 8274 4902

Graffiti removal
Report graffiti online. We aim to remove graffiti from council property within five days and offensive, including racist, graffiti anywhere in the borough within 48 hours.
☞ merton.gov.uk/graffiti
☞ 020 8274 4902

Homelessness
Advice and guidance for those at risk of becoming homeless.
☞ merton.gov.uk/homelessness
☞ housingadvice@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3636
☞ Out of hours 020 8770 5000 (5.30pm–9am)

Housing benefit
☞ merton.gov.uk/housingbenefit
☞ housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8274 4903

Housing register
☞ merton.gov.uk/allocations
☞ registration@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3305

Leisure
Hall hire, school holiday activities, sports pitches and courts.
☞ merton.gov.uk/leisure
☞ leisure@merton.gov.uk

Libraries
☞ merton.gov.uk/libraries
☞ library.enquiries@merton.gov.uk
☞ 0333 370 4700

Licensing
☞ licensing@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3969

Litter bins
Report a problem with a litter bin.
☞ merton.gov.uk/litter-bins
☞ 020 8274 4902

Local land charges searches
☞ merton.gov.uk/landcharges
☞ local.landcharges@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3350

Local Studies and Heritage Centre
☞ merton.gov.uk/localstudies
☞ local.studies@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3239

Morden Library
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

MASCOT Telecare
Helps people to live safely, securely and independently in their own homes. The service is available 24/7 and uses simple technology linked to our response centre.
☞ merton.gov.uk/mascot
☞ 020 8274 5940

Noise nuisance
☞ merton.gov.uk/noise
☞ noiseandnuisance@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3025 (9am–5pm)
☞ Out of hours 020 8543 9750 (Friday and Saturday 11pm–4am)

Occupational therapy
The occupational therapy service provides a range of services to people living with a permanent and substantial physical disability.
☞ merton.gov.uk/occupationaltherapy
☞ ssotduty@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 4428 or 020 8545 4477 (9.30am–12.30pm)

Parking
Penalty Charge Notices, parking permits and car parks.
☞ merton.gov.uk/parking
☞ parking@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 4661 (11am–4pm)

Parks
☞ merton.gov.uk/parks
☞ 020 3876 8806, press option 7 for Merton parks

Planning
☞ merton.gov.uk/planning
☞ planning@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8545 3777 (1–3pm)

Pot holes
See roads and highways

Public health
☞ merton.gov.uk/publichealth

Register office
Contact the register office if you want to get married, have a civil ceremony or civil partnership, register a birth or death, name a baby or take part in a citizenship ceremony.
☞ merton.gov.uk/register
☞ register.office@merton.gov.uk
☞ 020 8274 5777

Morden Park House
Morden Park
London Road
Morden SM4 5QU
Opening hours 9am–4.30pm

The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.
Roads and highways
merton.gov.uk/roads-highways-pavements
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 (10am–4pm)

Rubbish and recycling
merton.gov.uk/recycling
020 8274 4902

Schools admissions
merton.gov.uk/schools
020 8274 4906

Snow clearance
We take action, as far as reasonably practicable, to allow the safe movement of all highway users on important routes in the borough, and keep delays to a minimum. This work includes gritting and salting roads to reduce the risk of ice forming, as well as clearing roads and pavements of accumulated ice and snow.
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700

Street cleaning
merton.gov.uk/street-care-cleaning
020 8274 4902

Street lighting
merton.gov.uk/streetlighting
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 (10am–5pm)

Trading standards
merton.gov.uk/tradingstandards
trading.standards@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3025 (9am–5pm)

Tree preservation
A tree preservation order is an order made by the council intended to protect one or more trees or woodland if its removal would have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public.
merton.gov.uk/tpo
planning@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3777 or 3815 (1–3pm)

The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.

Connecting Merton

Want to get online but don’t have a computer? Need help with using a computer?

Anyone can use the libraries’ computers and access the WiFi for free. If you have your own tablet or laptop but struggle to get online, just visit your nearest library and start surfing for free. Our libraries offer one-to-one IT support, plus a range of IT courses for beginners right the way through to the more advanced.

Library staff and volunteers have helped residents to keep in contact with their community through Connecting Merton, an IT-equipment-loaning scheme. Any resident aged 18 or over can borrow a laptop or a tablet and get online to carry out essential daily tasks and to stay in touch with loved ones.

To access all of these services, all you need to be is a library member. If you’re not yet a library member and would like to join, registering is quick and free. Pop in to any of our seven branches, call 0333 370 4700 or visit merton.gov.uk/libraries

0333 370 4700
merton.gov.uk/libraries

Ref: 1110.69
Merton has rich sporting heritage, and we have an ambition to get everyone to be more active in our Borough of Sport.

As home to famous venues, including the All England Lawn Tennis Club, Plough Lane, where we were able to help bring AFC Wimbledon home, and Mitcham Cricket Club, which has one of the oldest pitches in the world, we want to inspire residents to be more active and reap all the physical, social and mental health benefits that movement offers.

We are creating a blueprint to become a Borough of Sport – setting out a long term plan to encourage future sports stars from the area and encourage healthy lifestyles across Merton.

To get this underway, the council agreed an £11m programme of sports investment – including refurbishment of pitches and courts across the borough, plans for the development of a new running track in east Merton, and fund free tennis lessons for residents. In addition to this, the recipients of our £1.3m Civic Pride Investing In Neighbourhoods Fund, announced last month, include grassroots sports clubs, training young people to deliver sports coaching, an outdoor gym, a playground that will be upgraded, and the transformation of a multi-use games area. Being more active outdoors is a great way to enjoy our beautiful parks.
The Civic Pride Fund is the largest amount of money that the council has distributed to the voluntary sector in recent years. Of this, £4.9m is through the Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector Civic Pride Fund, which will fund 18 organisations delivering 24 projects over three years from the spring.

Charity Merton Vision, which offers support services for people with sight or hearing loss, including benefits advice and building up their confidence to travel, will receive £244,000 to provide outreach services, while Merton Centre for Independent Living will receive £148,248 to deliver health, finance, welfare, social care, travel, and housing support and advice for deaf and disabled residents.

Merton Mencap will receive £54,772 for a Community Facilitator service to help adults with learning disabilities or autism live more independently. Adult social-welfare charity Merton and Morden Guild has been allocated £120,000 to host group activities for people aged over 55, to help reduce isolation and increase their wellbeing, while Merton Community Transport will use £43,966 to support lonely residents.

Some of the projects focus on supporting residents through the cost-of-living emergency. Power Centre Church will receive £38,073 to run an extended foodbank, provide advice and referrals for further support services, and train a new team of volunteers. Commonside Community Development Trust will receive £142,574 to provide a drop-in community café, serving hot two-course meals on weekdays, plus a range of activities for vulnerable and elderly residents in Pollards Hill.

North East Mitcham Community Association will receive £34,253 to run breakfast and lunch clubs and an initiative to help reduce the risk of falls for elderly people.
Every time a large home-building project gets underway, the developer has to pay a tax called the Community Infrastructure Levy. The majority of the levy is then used to support infrastructure projects that will help to accommodate the new residents, including school expansions, station access improvements, or roadworks.

But 15% of this tax is set aside for neighbourhood projects and, last autumn, we invited community groups to bid for a share of £1.3m to help us achieve our priorities of nurturing civic pride, building a sustainable future and creating a Borough of Sport. Last month, we were delighted to announce the 22 successful applicants who will receive money from the Investing In Neighbourhoods Civic Pride Fund.

These include Uptown Youth Services, which will receive £15,000 to provide mentoring for disadvantaged young people, supporting them as they decide what they want to achieve in the future. Towards Employment have been allocated £74,960 to equip residents with the skills they need to find new jobs.

The historic Chapter House near Merton Abbey Mills will now be able to host drama by youth theatre charity Anima Una with a £33,000 investment, and the Mitcham Arts Collective will receive £12,000 to fund a new arts and entertainment hub at Vestry Hall in Mitcham. Survive to Thrive, which supports adults with learning disabilities, will be able to host arts and crafts community workshops with its £115,600 and an £87,000 grant for improvements to facilities will support an expansion of activities at the South Mitcham Community Centre.

In our Borough of Sport, the Merton Saints BMX Club will use £130,000 to upgrade their track so that they can host more competitions. The multi-use games area at Garfield Recreation Ground will receive £120,000 and Mitcham Cricket Club has been allocated £34,000 for improvements at the cricket green. An outdoor gym will be built in Moreton Green, Mitcham, with a £35,000 investment, and the Merton School Sport Partnership will use their £144,275 to train new coaches to lead PE sessions in schools. Pre-schoolers will be able to enjoy Morden Park Playground, which is getting £75,522, and £82,000 is being spent on a step-free path in Cannizaro Park valley to give buggies a smoother ride to the popular pond area. Families in Mitcham will be able to try new recipes at Ready Steady Cook classes in Mitcham, funded by a £42,750 grant.

The civic pride funding will also help us to create a more sustainable borough. A garden streets biodiversity programme, which will focus on volunteer-led planting, is receiving £35,173 and a rain garden and sustainable drainage system in Kenilworth Green has been allocated £65,000. The Wheel, a community waste reduction and circular economy hub is set to expand using a £63,615 investment and, the Community Champions Programme, which helps to promote sustainable ways of living, will be able to add to their team.

For a full list of all the Civic Pride Fund recipients, visit merton.gov.uk/civicpridefunds
Merton is committed to reducing carbon emissions to net zero as a borough by 2050. Encouraging more people to walk and cycle is something that can help us meet that commitment, as well as keeping Merton residents healthy and active.

We’ve listened to you so we know that making Merton’s streets safer for cyclists is one of your top priorities. We have already implemented stepped cycle paths on Bishopsford Road and Holborn Way in Mitcham. Cyclists on Merton High Street will soon be able to benefit from the greater protection, comfort and safety stepped cycle tracks offer when work is complete to introduce one there.

Merton has also upgraded parts of the Wandle Trail – the resurfacing work will make it easier for cyclists to enjoy the heritage, flora and fauna the trail provides.

However, many people will still have to use their cars. We’re upgrading and resurfacing our car parks so they are safer for the vehicles and pedestrians using them, allowing residents and visitors to make the most of all Merton has to offer – and we’re adding additional parking spaces where possible.

E-bikes come to Merton!

Just before Christmas, the council was delighted to sign a contract with HumanForest to bring e-bikes to Merton. The agreement is part of our support for more active travel, making cycling accessible to more people, and will help residents reduce their CO2 emissions.

The partnership gives residents the opportunity to use HumanForest bikes for 10 minutes of free cycling each day, with more minutes available using HumanForest’s Treecoin loyalty programme.

We know that active transport is key to health and wellbeing, but we also want to make sure that residents using e-bikes can use them responsibly – so we’re working hard with HumanForest to plan the introduction of bikes to Merton so users park them responsibly and don’t obstruct pavements for pedestrians or those with mobility issues. If you haven’t tried e-bikes yet, why not give them a go – and get on your bike!

More EV charging points

Last year, Merton Council was successful in securing a £750,000 grant to install additional lamp column electric-vehicle charging points in residential roads across the borough.

Merton already has 130 lamp column chargers and 143 Source London chargers on our streets – as well as five charge points in Morden Park car park.

400 new locations for lamp column EVCPs have already identified and are now being installed. Work will continue over the next few months. Find out more.
Building a place to call home

Two of the largest housing schemes in a generation are underway – a plan to build 400 affordable and sustainable new homes on council land, plus the regeneration of three large estates.

Merton is committed to a sustainable future and we’ve set targets to reduce our borough’s carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

Housing is one of the areas identified by the independent Climate Change Committee where significant work still needs to be done. Clarion have won first-round funding to carry out decarbonisation work at some homes in Merton, which will begin later this year, and more decarbonisation is in the pipeline.

To find out how to make the most of the environmental and economic benefits of decarbonising housing in Merton, Council Leader Councillor Ross Garrod and Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning Councillor Sally Kenny recently visited Clarion Housing Association’s decarbonisation project near Tonbridge in Kent.

The visit to Tonbridge gave councillors the opportunity to see how residents were already benefitting. By making homes more heat and energy efficient, bills have been drastically reduced and homes are much warmer even in the below-zero temperatures experienced this winter.

Councillor Kenny was keen to understand how employing residents to carry out some of the work, which includes insulation and in some cases changes to windows and doors, could bring an economic and employment boost to Merton.

Regenerating three estates

The council and Clarion’s £1.3bn regeneration of Eastfields, High Path and Ravensbury continues. Once complete, there will be over 2,700 high-quality new homes and 9,000 square metres of new community and commercial space in the borough.

At High Path, almost all of the 134 new properties in phase one are now occupied, three-quarters of them by social-housing tenants. Demolition work to make way for phase two will begin this spring.

At Ravensbury, phase two is due to be completed by the end of the year, with the first residents expected to move in this autumn.

At Eastfields, Clarion continues to run resident information events, and Council Leader Councillor Ross Garrod visited in January to listen to residents’ feedback on the regeneration.

400 affordable new homes

Ten sites on council land across the borough have been identified for the construction of new homes. The council is now reviewing these sites and planning the best way to begin work to meet our ambitious target of constructing 400 new affordable homes in Merton by 2026.
feature
Borough of Sport

Take an active role in our Borough of Sport

The council is teaming up with partners to create new opportunities for everyone to be more active.

We want Merton to be known as a Borough of Sport – where opportunities for every resident to get more active are easy to find and take part in.

To develop these plans, the council is working with London Sport on a blueprint for sport and physical activity – with a special focus on residents who may be facing challenges to becoming more active.

The aim is for all four to 16-year-olds, plus everyone aged 65 and over, to be able to take part in at least one free sporting activity each week, bringing together public bodies, voluntary groups, businesses and grassroots organisations. With over 450 events already taking place each month, including yoga and exercise classes, health and wellbeing zones, and footballs available on loan in partnership with the Premier League and Sport England, Merton’s libraries are already great places to get active.

Work is also going on to raise awareness of green prescribing, the Live Longer Better programme for older people, and encouraging children and young people to cycle and walk around local areas by making them fun places to be.

The council also has its first ever cabinet member with a role dedicated to improving sports development – Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah.

Wimbledon Leisure Centre has a new neon-lit cycle studio.

Dedicated to sports development, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah meets Morden Leisure Centre manager James Davis.
Leisure centres upgraded

Morden and Wimbledon Leisure Centres have been transformed in response to customer demand – and Councillor Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage, went to see the upgrades.

Wimbledon Leisure Centre, which dates from 1901, has maximised the unique building in its refurbishment – the gym and workout space has amazing new light installations and wall art, as well as new functional equipment, to create an inspirational space.

The cycling studio is even more atmospheric – the old lifeless room is now a modern studio with neon lights, a new sound system and instructor’s platform to inspire group cycle classes.

At Morden Leisure Centre, the free weight and resistance area has been extended to offer the best range of equipment in Merton. Treadmills taken out have been redistributed to Wimbledon and The Canons in Mitcham, so they are still available for Merton residents.

Both centres offer something for every age group: Morden has one of the largest swimming schools in the country, and both gyms have regular clients in their 90s right down to the extremely popular kids’ gym classes.

Why not pop in to your local centre and find out what is going on? As well as our leisure centres, there are free outdoor gyms and table tennis tables to use across the borough – check out the website to find out more.

#ActivelyMerton

Actively Merton is a partnership programme that includes the council and partners such as NHS South West London and South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust. Linking into Merton’s Borough of Sport ambitions, it aims to get more people being physically and socially active by connecting them with activities across Merton.

Let’s Beat The Street

You might have noticed something unusual on the streets of Merton this spring. Contactless beat boxes appeared across the borough overnight, and people of all ages and backgrounds are walking, running and cycling in between them. Beat the Street is a popular interactive game that encourages people to walk, cycle and wheel. The game is free and open to anyone who lives, works or studies in Merton and will take place across the borough from Wednesday 15 March to Wednesday 26 April. With every tap, a smile appears on a player’s face because they know they are getting further ahead in the game. Intrigued? It is not too late to join them. Win prizes, complete challenges, climb leaderboards and travel as far as you can.

How does the game work?

- Players earn points via contactless beat boxes attached to lampposts around the local area or by using Beat the Street app. Points are earned as you travel between at least two boxes within an hour.
- Points score points by hovering their game cards at beat boxes. Points are shown on leaderboards on a local Beat the Street website.
- The most active participants win everyone’s admiration and prizes!

Find out more here: www.beatthestreet.me and, if you share your game progress online, remember to use the hashtags: #ActivelyMerton and #beatthestreet so you and others can see your progress.
With you every step of the way

Actively Merton is a collaborative initiative that includes the council and partners including NHS South West London. Linking into Merton’s Borough of Sport ambitions, it aims to get more people being physically and socially active by promoting the Walk and Talk Movement, Wimbledon Guild and many other outdoor events. Joining one of these initiatives is a great way to enjoy our parks and open spaces in the company of like-minded locals.

Merton Moves

Merton Moves is run by Wimbledon Guild and offers older people six weeks of one-to-one coaching to find an activity they enjoy. Christine Conway moved to Merton from Hampshire in the summer of 2022 and, although she didn’t know anyone, she’s an outgoing person who wanted to remain active. “I have arthritis and have had one hip replaced but I felt it was important to exercise,” Christine explains. “I looked online to see what classes were available and found Merton Moves at Wimbledon Guild. They were so lovely that I enrolled in the six-week pledge and now do Tai Chi and pilates once a week. The classes are geared towards older people, some of whom have limited mobility. It’s been wonderful for my mental and physical wellbeing. The guild is also a great place to meet people and enjoy a spot of lunch.”

To find out more about Merton Moves and Wimbledon Guild, visit www.wimbledonguild.co.uk/merton-moves or call 020 8946 0735.

Walk and Talk

The Walk and Talk Movement brings people from across Merton together in a fun, healthy and engaging way. It provides free community walks every Saturday at 10.30am at Wimbledon Park, Canons House, Morden Hall Park, Colliers Wood and Plough Lane. Growing from an idea by local residents Andy Yates and Ali Palmer, the movement began in Wimbledon Park in 2021 and it now boasts more than 3,500 participants and 700 regular walkers.

Brian Narborough lost his wife a few years ago and then found Walk and Talk online. “I joined my first walk six months ago,” he says, “and before long I’d started volunteering for the initiative. I now lead most walks. It’s a great way to chat with – and get to know – new people. I love having a coffee with the walkers afterwards and I meet people from the group socially during the week.”

To get involved, visit www.walkandtalkmovement.org.

|

24 feature
Borough of Sport

Christine Conway

Brian Narborough
Providing a sanctuary for Ukrainian refugees

It’s been more than a year since Russia invaded Ukraine and forced millions of people to flee their homes. The UK Government responded to the emergency by setting up Homes4Ukraine, a scheme that enables members of the public to offer their spare bedrooms to Ukrainian refugees.

Merton Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to welcome refugees. Its staff carry out the necessary property and safeguarding checks, as well as working with key voluntary sector organisations to support refugees and their host families. This support has provided education, social care and homelessness assistance; made hardship payments to refugees; and helped them integrate into the community.

Host sponsors register on the UK Government website and, after an initial check by the Home Office, the council inspects the property to make sure it’s suitable. When members of the council’s team visit, they explain the process to the potential host and arrange a DBS check. Once approved, sponsors can apply for a thank-you payment of £350 per month from the Government via the council.

Working together, the Polish Families Association (PFA) and Commonside Trust have established the Merton Ukraine Hub where refugees can get language and practical support to register with a GP, apply for school places, register with the Home Office, open a bank account, apply for a National Insurance number, and claim benefits.

The PFA team helps families complete the necessary paperwork and organises additional English classes as well as art therapy, craft activities, cultural events and help finding work. The Wimbledon Guild provides hardship grants and advice and support for host families, and all our guests are eligible for additional food support from the PFA.

Signing up as a host under the Homes4Ukraine scheme can be very rewarding and it’s a great way to make a difference to people’s lives. To find out more about the Homes4Ukraine scheme or to become a sponsor, email us at refugee.support@merton.gov.uk or call the Merton Community Hub on 020 8066 4086.

Merton residents, including Ukrainian refugees, gathered outside the civic centre on 24 February to mark the first year anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The Mayor of Merton gave a short speech and a minute’s silence was held.
Fostering has benefits for families as well as the children who are being supported, according to a foster mum who has more than a decade’s experience of looking after children who are unable to live at home.

Joanne and Tony have been fostering as a family for 13 years. Joanne is a qualified nursery nurse who worked in early years settings and as a nanny before the family embarked on their fostering journey. “Our eldest child was five when we started,” she explains. “Since then, our family has grown around our commitment to fostering and we are now a family of five. Our children enjoy welcoming new children into our home and they love the fostering experience.”

Over the years, Joanne has had more than 20 placements, all under different circumstances. Some of the children have returned home, while others have gone to live with family members or have been adopted.

“Fostering involves working with a whole team of professionals, including the child’s social worker,” Joanne adds. “You also attend reviews, take them to appointments, and make sure that the children have family time in a supervised setting. When you become a foster carer, you will have your own supervising social worker who will support you and guide you through ongoing training, as well as helping you get in touch with other foster carers.

“We feel that fostering has helped our own kids become more well-rounded individuals and we all cherish the times we’ve spent with the foster children. Although it’s sad when they leave us, we know that we have given them a great chance in life and that they will take lovely memories with them.”

If you would like to be a foster carer, you will need to be over the age of 21 and live in Merton or one of the neighbouring boroughs. You must also be able to work in the UK, have a spare bedroom, and have the time and energy to care for a child who may be vulnerable.

Foster carers also need a good support network of friends and family, as well as being able to work with a team of social care professionals, teachers and birth parents. If you and your partner, as well as any children, can help the foster child feel welcome, safe and comfortable in your home, you will have met the main requirements for becoming a foster parent.

Merton Council supports its carers using the Mockingbird model, which has been shown to bring significant benefits to foster children and their extended families. You will receive ongoing training and a generous allowance of up to £514 per week for each child. This covers their clothing, food, travel, pocket money and any special equipment they may need. You will receive a contribution towards the increase in your bills, as well as extra money towards birthdays, religious festivals and holidays.

Foster carers, Joanne and Tony

find out more: merton.gov.uk/fostering
All families need a bit of support from time to time, but it can be difficult for parents to know where to turn for guidance. Our new family hubs will bring together services and information together in one place for parents.

Parenting can be as challenging as it is rewarding and some families have told us that they don’t always know how and where to seek guidance about their child’s development or support for themselves.

There can be a bewildering array of sources of information, both online and in the community. However, the way that guidance and support is given to parents and their children in Merton is set to be transformed by family hubs.

The council has received funding from the Department for Education’s Family Hub Transformation Programme to bring together a wide range of council run services, health clinics, plus support for specific issues from the voluntary sector and community groups in one place – in family hubs. The aim of these hubs is to offer parents access, connection and relationships as they navigate their way through family life.

The family hubs are being set up using insights from parents’ experiences to ensure that they deliver the support that families need. The hubs are intended to be an entry point, providing both a physical and virtual space for families to visit and speak to trained staff members who will give them information or advice on a range of family issues. Parents will also be signposted to appropriate specialised services if they or their children need more targeted support.

As well as providing advice and information, the hubs also run lots of fun learning activities and play groups for children, which also give their mums and dads an opportunity to meet other parents and build their local support network further.

It isn’t just families with young children who can benefit from hubs, which are there to provide support for any families with children aged up to 19, or 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Find out more
merton.gov.uk/familyhubs
Community takes a stand against rubbish dumpers

Netley Gardens and St Helier Avenue in Mitcham are a prime example of what can be achieved when the community and council work together.

Netley Gardens and St Helier Avenue in Mitcham have had dumped rubbish banished from the streets, thanks to the council’s Keep It Clean Love Merton campaign.

Working with residents and ward councillors, the council’s enforcement team helped to transform the green in Netley Gardens and nearby hedgerow along St Helier Avenue, which was being regularly littered with dumped rubbish, including furniture and black bags.

To tackle this anti-social behaviour, council officers met the community to understand the challenges and identify areas to target. The council then deployed a mobile CCTV camera, implemented daily foot patrols by our enforcement officers and sent letters and flyers to the surrounding area, reminding locals of how to dispose of their rubbish responsibly.

Four weeks later, the dumped rubbish in this hotspot stopped and the hedgerow along St Helier Avenue was clear of litter and debris. This joint action shows the power of civic pride in the area and how it can stop the small minority of people who think it’s okay to dump rubbish on our streets.

Tackling the rubbish dumpers

Keeping Merton’s streets clean is a top priority for the council. Sadly, it is a constant battle to catch and fine these criminals and that is why we have:

- Increased the number of enforcement officers on the streets. Plus, in 2022, officers issued 3,800 fixed penalty notices for littering and almost 1,000 for fly-tipping.
- Deployed CCTV to hotspot areas.
- Introduced the Fix My Street app, a quick and easy way to report fly-tipping.
- Launched a monthly Wall of Shame CCTV appeal.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

TO KEEP MERTON CLEAN

- Always dispose of your own rubbish responsibly. Make the most of your kerbside recycling and rubbish collection service or book a visit to the Household Reuse and Recycling Centre in Garth Road, Morden.
- Report dumped rubbish via our website or on the Fix My Street app.
- Watch the latest Wall of Shame CCTV appeal episode where we post footage of people illegally dumping rubbish on our streets, and help us identify and catch these criminals.
- To stay up to date on all things clean and green – including our monthly Wall of Shame appeal, follow our social media channels and sign up to our weekly e-newsletter merton.gov.uk/newsletter.

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10,000 trees planted

In one year, Merton Council has planted 10,000 new trees in the borough to increase our tree canopy, our biodiversity and to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

Planting 10,000 new trees in Merton in the last 12 months has made it one of our biggest tree-planting years ever. This is part of our goal to increase our tree canopy by 10% by 2050, which means planting new trees and ensuring we look after the trees we currently have. This is part of a new tree strategy for Merton.

The tree strategy is a commitment by Merton on managing the incredible variety of trees in our borough over the coming years, including those in our parks and open spaces, lining our streets and growing in school grounds. Increasing our tree canopy is at the heart of Merton Council’s vision to help make our borough greener, cleaner and to nurture civic pride.

Planting 10,000 trees in one year has been made possible by new partners and over £75,000 worth of external investment to ensure our new trees become established and continue to grow for decades to come.

The Queen’s Green Canopy - As part of this initiative, 3,000 trees were planted to mark the Queen’s Jubilee and the birth of every child born in the borough in 2022. In addition, a commemorative tree is being planted in each of Merton’s 20 wards to provide a focal point for community members to reflect on the late Queen’s life and reign.

The Urban Tree Challenge - The challenge is part of the Government’s Nature for Climate Fund, which supports the planting of trees in urban areas, including 28 parks across Merton.

Trees for Cities Urban Tree Planting Fund - Together with Trees for Cities, we are planting a beautiful community woodland on Cranmer Green in Mitcham in memory of the late Dave Lofthouse, Arboricultural Manager at Merton Council for 33 years. Over 6,000 whips, plus 12 trees are being planted, along with woodland bulbs and wildflower meadows.

Trees for Streets Tree Sponsorship Scheme - Supported by the Mayor of London, this national scheme enables individuals and businesses to sponsor street tree planting in Merton using an online portal.

Tree Wardens for City Trees - Tree Warden Group Merton is a voluntary group that works closely with Merton Council's arboriculture officers to help our trees to thrive.

If you would like to volunteer or find out more, email enquiries@treewardensmerton.org.uk.

Tree Warden Jane Plant helps out with tree planting at the Dave Lofthouse Memorial Woodland on Cranmer Green.
God save The King

6 May will mark a historic moment, not only for our nation, but also in the lives of many of its residents - the opportunity to witness the coronation of the new King. This edition of My Merton looks at the borough’s links to Charles III and how local residents have celebrated key dates in his lifetime.

In November 1948, people in Merton and across the nation celebrated the birth of a new prince and heir to the throne, Charles, the first child of Princess Elizabeth and her husband, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Photographs captured many aspects of the young prince’s childhood, including one charming image from the early 1950s, which pictured him with an impressive Centurion pedal car – a gift from Lines Bros. Triang Works on Morden Road, suppliers of toys to the Crown.

In 1958, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II announced that her eldest child would be given the title Prince of Wales. The official investiture took place on 1 July 1969 at Caernarfon Castle and, for the first time, the historic ceremony was broadcast on television. The event clearly captured the imagination of the children of Hollymount Primary School in Raynes Park who staged their own investiture before the assembled school.

Whilst Prince of Wales, Charles III made a number of visits to Merton, one of the most memorable was in February 1996 when he arrived at Phipps Bridge estate by helicopter, much to the excitement of the assembled crowds. The Prince viewed improvements being made to the estate, visited the local community centre and took time to speak to as many tenants as possible, even visiting some in their new homes. He then travelled to Deen City Farm, meeting staff and children responsible for the care of animals. His visit concluded with a special lunch at Merton College, attended by guests of The Prince’s Trust.

Charles III has visited the annual Wimbledon tennis championships on two occasions, firstly in 1970 to watch play between Dennis Ralston and John Newcombe; then in 2012, accompanied by the then Duchess of Cornwall, he cheered Roger Federer’s victory over Fabio Fognini.

Founded by the then Prince of Wales in 1976, The Prince’s Trust has helped thousands of vulnerable young people, in Merton and beyond to get their lives on track.

Through mentoring, training and financial support, the charity has
The Coronation of His Majesty Charles III

supported young people aged 11–30 who are unemployed, struggling at school or at risk of exclusion.

Merton College launched a partnership with the trust in 1996 and, in October 2005, the work of its Prince's Trust Unit was celebrated by a visit from both Prince Charles and Prince William. The royal guests watched a presentation from young people whose lives have been transformed by The Prince's Trust programmes. They also took time to chat with college students and residents.

Over the centuries, a number of local firms have been rewarded with the Royal Warrant, a mark of recognition for longstanding suppliers of goods or services to a designated royal patron. Charles III is renowned both as a patron of the arts and for championing heritage crafts. As Prince of Wales, he awarded a Royal Warrant to A C Cooper Ltd of Colwood Gardens, Colliers Wood. Founded in 1918 by Augustus Charles Cooper, the firm specialises in photographing works of art for important institutions and collectors worldwide. It has been privileged to hold three Royal Warrants during its century of service.

As in other parts of the country, there was a huge outpouring of grief in Merton following the death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022. In addition to deep sympathy for the Royal Family, there was also a great sense of support for the new King, as shown by the crowds who assembled to see Councillor Joan Henry, Mayor of Merton, proclaim the Accession of Charles III at Merton Civic Centre on 11 September.

Now local people can look forward to the colour, pageantry and excitement of our new King’s coronation. Records show that Merton residents have always celebrated such occasions with great enthusiasm, so 6 May promises to be a day to remember.

Host a coronation street party

Residents are invited to apply to hold street parties to celebrate the King’s coronation with family, friends and neighbours. Successful applicants will be able to close roads to traffic on one day over the bank holiday on 6, 7 or 8 May. The deadline for applications is 31 March. Apply to hold a street party and find out more about the celebrations being planned merton.gov.uk/coronation

Share your celebrations on social media using the hashtag #MertonCoronation
The rising cost of living means more people are struggling with their finances and debt than ever before. Money problems can be a consequence of rising household bills, issues at work, relationship difficulties, sickness, and even changes to benefit payments.

Debt support in Merton

If you are worried about meeting your bills or are falling behind on other payments, Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth (CAML) will do their best to help, including at Merton Council-funded drop-in sessions at three of our local libraries. Here, Karen and Homa talk you through what steps you can take to ease the pressure on your finances.

What’s the first thing you should do if you start falling into debt or you’re worried you may not be able to pay your bills in the near future?

You get into debt when you spend more than you earn. This can start by simply using your overdraft to pay for essentials while you’re waiting for your next pay packet, or you may be unable to pay off your credit card. However, as the months tick by, you can often find the debt starts to spiral.

The earlier you deal with the debt or seek support, the easier it is to resolve. If you’re in debt or are worried you won’t be able to meet your bills, you should make a list of everyone you owe and how much money you owe them. This might include arrears on your rent, credit-card debt, council tax arrears, money you’ve borrowed from a bank, or even cash lent to you by friends and family.

Do I need to worry about some debts more than others?

There are two types of debt – priority and non-priority – so you should focus on the most important payments. If you’re worried about not being able to pay your energy bills, for example, you should call your provider and explain the situation to them. They will often be able to help.

Other examples of priority debt include rent or mortgage arrears and council tax arrears. The consequences of not paying these debts can lead to the loss of your home, your gas or electricity being disconnected, a fine or even imprisonment.

Non-priority debts include your credit card and overdraft. The consequences of not paying these debts aren’t as severe but you should always keep lenders informed if you are experiencing financial difficulties.

What else can you do to bolster your finances?

It’s not difficult to save a little around the home by switching off unused appliances, turning your heating down by a degree and using draft excluders. You could also check if you can claim benefits, ensure you’re on the right wage and the deductions are accurate, and check if you can get help with your bills or council tax.

Local charities can often help people who are struggling financially, you could look into renting out a spare room if you have one, and it’s also worth checking if you’re eligible for child maintenance.

If you live, work or study in Merton, you can contact CAML on 0808 278 7831 or complete an online query form at www.caml.org.uk. We also have cost-of-living advisers in Colliers Wood Library (Mondays), the Wide Ways Medical Centre in Mitcham (Tuesdays), Wimbledon Library (Thursdays) and Pollards Hill Library (Fridays). Other debt and support organisations are listed here merton.gov.uk/costofliving.