

We are

FREEZING

your

Council Tax



We are **FREEZING** the main element of your **Council Tax***. This means that the biggest part of it won't be going up this year, leaving more money in your pocket.

We're only able to do this because we've been careful with money – managing our budgets well, attracting funding into the borough, and paying down debt, so that we can spend more on what matters to you.

The freeze means you will continue to pay less than our neighbours in Kingston, Croydon, Richmond and Sutton.

How much extra the average household in our neighbouring boroughs will pay annually†:

Kingston	£467 more
Croydon	£459 more
Richmond	£346 more
Sutton	£238 more
Merton	Keeping bills low

* This means a freeze to the part of Council Tax that funds general expenditure. We know how important it is to look after our older and vulnerable residents, and we're determined to keep providing excellent care and support our NHS. An increase of 2% in the adult social care precept will help fund this. There will also be an increase from the Greater London Authority in their precept, to invest in neighbourhood policing and tackling crime.

† Figures based on the annual total for a Band D property in 2026/27.

iN MERTON



INSIDE

Better services
and better value –
offering residents
more of the things
that matter to you

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Photos © Suzanne Mitchell Photography

**iN Merton**

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Doing more for you

Spring is always a time of renewal, and for councils up and down the country it means setting the budget and our plans for the coming municipal year.

As you will have seen on the front of this edition of iNMerton, we are freezing the main element of Council Tax this year. We are one of the only councils in the country to be doing this. That's because we promised to keep bills low to help you with your family finances. We're only able to do this because we've been good with money – managing our budgets well, attracting funding into the borough, and paying down debt, so we have more to spend on your services.

The freeze means that you'll continue to pay significantly less than you would in neighbouring Croydon, Sutton, Richmond, or Kingston – which has the highest Council Tax in London.

Even with the freeze, our strong financial management means that – as most other councils cut back – we are able to offer you more of the things that matter to you, and you'll see some examples of this throughout the magazine.

We've introduced a brand-new graffiti removal service to clean up our town centres, and you can

see the difference they're making on page five.

We're adding more neighbourhood wardens to our Safer Streets Team who will help us patrol every neighbourhood, every week, including on evenings and weekends. Find out more about how they are working with the police to enforce the law and issue fines on page 17.

Because of the decisions we took managing a council-owned company, we turned it into a global success story and sold it for £186m. You can read about how we are spending this one-off money to benefit Merton on page nine. On page 11, you can find out which transformative community projects have won our Merton Legacy Fund vote for the first £3m of funding, whilst page 15 has information on our £30m investment to kickstart the regeneration of Morden – bringing jobs and opportunities to the whole borough.

Our pop-up tips – which so many residents have told me they love – have been expanded, so you will have one near you four times a year. Find out more on page 13.

Finally, our ambition to be London's Borough of Sport goes from strength to strength – you can see why our free swimming



© Paul Tanner Photography

for under-16s and over-65s is so popular on page 21, and there's some very exciting news about a new event coming to Merton on page 33.

Whether it's keeping bills down, building new council homes, cleaning up your streets, or offering you things you wouldn't get if you lived elsewhere – we're on your side. I'm proud of what we've achieved so far, and we'll keep on striving to offer you better services and better value.

To find out more about our budget and the Council Tax freeze, visit merton.gov.uk/freeze

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Garrod".

Councillor Ross Garrod
Leader of Merton Council



Businesses take up free graffiti removal service

Businesses have been using the council's new free graffiti removal service to clean tags off their premises.

Mimi Kifle, owner of Ethio True Beauty salon in Mitcham, contacted the council after graffiti appeared on the shutters of her shop.

"I care about this area because I've been here a long time," she said.

"I looked into removing the graffiti myself, but it was too expensive. I didn't know what to do."

The council has set aside extra money in this year's budget to launch a new graffiti removal service offering free cleaning for business premises. Dedicated teams remove the graffiti, working quickly to clean up the area and reduce repeat vandalism.

The council aims to complete 95% of requests within five working days, with all offensive or hate-related graffiti removed within 24 hours.

Mimi said: "I was over the moon when they offered to remove it. It looks nice and clean again. The best thing is coming to work and seeing everything fresh. It makes me happy to open the shop each day."

Growing a greener Merton

More than 750 trees have been planted in the borough as part of the council's pledge to plant 1,000 more street trees. The council is on track to meet its pledge by April. Many of the new trees have been planted where previous trees had to be removed after dying or becoming damaged or diseased.

Residents are asked to help water newly planted trees during dry periods while they are becoming established. Trees provide shade in the summer, improve air quality, and provide homes for insects and other organisms.

A total of 20 new pocket parks are opening in Merton, bringing more greenery to neighbourhoods. They are also a place for people to sit and socialise. Look out, too, for new planters full of flowers in the borough's colours – purple, green and white – to streets and town centres across the borough.



(L–R) Mark Wilson, from the council's new graffiti removal contractor, GB Facilities Services; and Ethio True Beauty salon owner Mimi Kifle

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography



Cleaning up town centres

On an early morning at Mitcham Market, Ali Shaaban watches as the council's street cleaning team jet washes the pavement outside the cafe where he is setting up for the day.

Ali, who works at Tag Elezz Cafe, in Upper Green East, Mitcham, said: "When the area around our cafe has been jet washed, it makes a huge difference for our business, as

we only have seating outdoors. I've noticed that our customer numbers always increase when the pavement around the cafe is clean.

He added: "Jet washed streets also make such a difference to me personally – both physically and mentally. I like walking or jogging along clean and odour-free streets, which helps to make me feel relaxed and stress-free."

Jet washing is happening in town centres across Merton, including Colliers Wood, Morden, Wimbledon and Wimbledon Village, as well as Mitcham. This is concentrated on busy pavements, which are used by thousands of people every day. This is funded by extra money allocated to street cleaning in this year's budget, which is also being used to replace damaged bins, carry out deep cleans and remove fly-tipping.

Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, Councillor Stephen Alambritis MBE said: "A new and improved street cleaning service was launched in Merton last April. This is directly managed by the council and includes a new, dedicated graffiti removal service. Every residential street in the borough is now cleaned at least once a week, with town centres receiving more frequent cleaning."

(L–R) Councillor Stephen Alambritis MBE with Aaron Dennis at Mitcham Market

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography



Residents vote on how to spend £3m

Earlier this year, the council gave residents a groundbreaking opportunity to help decide how to spend millions of pounds to transform neighbourhoods across Merton.

Around 2,400 local people cast a vote to decide how to spend the first £3m from the £15m Merton Legacy Fund and you can find out the result on page 11.

Elaine Bailey is a co-chair of the Legacy Fund's advisory board: a group of locals who whittled down thousands of ideas from the public into the three shortlists of options that were voted on.

Elaine said: "I absolutely jumped at the chance to get involved. As a Merton resident, it's really nice to be involved with things that are going on in my area and, hopefully, I can soon go into one of the parks near me and see a project that's actually been delivered. And think 'oh yes, I was part of that'.

"One of the things that I love is that it must have been tempting for the council to use this money to deal with the pressures they're facing, so I thought it was lovely that they put £15m aside to do projects that the community could have a direct say on."

Outlining the things that the board looked for in a proposal, she said: "First of all, we were looking at what each project is. What would the benefits be for the community? What will the impact be? But we also want things to be visible. We don't want to be saying to the community 'we've proposed £3m worth of projects and nobody sees anything for five years'. So we were looking at projects that we thought could be delivered relatively quickly. Hopefully, people won't have to wait too long until they see a difference in a park near them."

Where did the money come from?

The council turned a council company – the Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme (CHAS) – into a global success story. CHAS was a council service offering health and safety advice and accreditation to construction companies. Entrepreneurial thinking led the council to offer its services to other organisations and by 2020, CHAS had more than 30,000 clients. In 2023, the council decided to sell the company it built from scratch for £186m. By law, the council can't use this money for day-to-day spending on things like bin collections, roads, or social care. Instead, the council is using it to reduce debt, make safe investments for stable future returns and pay for one-off lasting improvements in the borough.

Report it! Sort it!

Have you got an issue in your neighbourhood?



Had a missed bin collection?



Seen graffiti or a broken bench?



Got an abandoned vehicle on your street?



Spotted a fly-tip?

Visit merton.gov.uk/reportsort or call 020 8274 4901 (choose option 6) to report it - and we'll sort it.



Making Merton cleaner, greener and safer

You've decided on the Merton Legacy Fund vote winner

After more than 2,400 votes were cast by Merton residents, a winner has been announced for the first round of the Merton Legacy Fund.

Option C – ‘Breathing new life into public spaces’ – is the winner of the first £3m of funding, which will see transformative community projects delivered across the borough. The vote between three different lists of projects ran for six weeks from 20 January to 3 March.

These projects will receive the first £3m from a total £15m fund set aside for projects chosen by the community. The aim is to improve local neighbourhoods and create benefits for residents both now and in the future.

This funding is only possible because the council turned a council-owned company into a global success story – earning the borough millions when the council sold it – and it's yet another example of how the council's strong financial management has made it possible to do more of the things that matter to you and your family.

The winning projects are:

Rain gardens – Helping to reduce the risk of flooding while also making streets greener and more attractive.

Womble-themed enhancements at Merton libraries – By investing in books, resources and play equipment in all seven children's libraries, we'll help children and families feel a strong connection to Merton.

New street lighting – Installing more street lighting across the borough will help people feel safer, especially after dark.

Outdoor gyms in parks – New and improved, free-to-use outdoor gym equipment and ‘Swing Boxes’ full of equipment in Oakleigh Way Recreation Ground, Pollards Hill Recreation Ground and Haydon's Road Recreation Ground.

Park playground upgrades – Making sure children of all ages have access to fun, safe and easy-to-use play spaces across the borough.

Morden Park pump track – A new purpose-built track for cycling, scooting and BMX.

Morden Park basketball court – A free court for people to play casually. More ‘Equip’ boxes, containing free-to-use or low-cost sports equipment, will also be installed.

Community-designed park improvements – Plans developed with local Friends of Parks groups, and the improvements will help protect and enhance parks that already meet high Green Flag standards.

£3M



Bodywork
Solutions

Closed Circuit
Television (CCTV)
is in operation to
ensure management
of the area and protect
your personal safety

RVA

DHOLLAN

DHOLLAN



Popular pop-up tips used by 10,000 residents

The council has made it easier than ever for residents to clear out unwanted items from their homes without even needing to leave their neighbourhood.

The council's pop-up tips have become increasingly popular since they were launched almost a year ago. Residents can get rid of bulky waste, including white goods and furniture, as well as small electronic items like toasters and hairdryers. Household batteries and paper can also be brought along for recycling.

Father and son, Riccardo and Enrico Dipalma were among the

residents to use the first pop-up tip of 2026 held in Pollards Hill last month.

Riccardo said: "I brought my nan's old furniture while we were helping her to move house. It was the first time I've used the service, and it couldn't have been easier. Normally, we'd have to take everything to the dump, which takes time and isn't very close, but this made it so convenient."

He added: "We made a few trips to drop things off, and the staff were really friendly and helpful. It made clearing out all that clutter so simple."

Every neighbourhood now receives at least four pop-up tips a year, helping residents to get rid of everything from broken appliances and outgrown toys to old furniture.

Last year, a total of 36 pop-up tips were held and a total of almost 10,000 residents used the free service.

The pop-up tips are one of the council's four pledges to make Merton cleaner, greener and safer by increasing recycling and cutting fly-tipping.

"It's such a useful service," added Riccardo. "You can finally get rid of things you've been holding on to for ages, and it doesn't feel like a chore. The team make it so straightforward."

The Council's Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, said: "Pop-up tips are a practical way to support cleaner streets and reduce fly-tipping. They give residents a local, convenient option to dispose of bulky items responsibly. The service is quick, friendly and designed to make life easier for everyone. We're excited to see it back and running in full in 2026."

Find out when the next pop-up tip will be held in your neighbourhood:



(L-R) Veolia collections driver Kwaku Owar, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Riccardo and Enrico Dipalma

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography



NOTICES

Public Space Learning
A poster with various diagrams and text, including a circular diagram with four colored segments (green, blue, red, yellow) and a central white circle.

LE12U



Extra £30m invested to regenerate Morden

“Morden is where it’s at,” according to Siobhan Dodd, a comedian and Registered Sign Language Interpreter, who has lived in the area for 20 years.

She said: “I love the location – I can access central London easily, but I don’t need to go into town with so much on my doorstep. I love the cultural events. Last year’s We Are Merton Festival, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the borough of Merton being created, was held on my birthday – it was the biggest party ever!”

The mum of two added: “Morden really is a great place for families. We’re spoilt for choice with good schools and there’s a great school community. The parks are a sanctuary and it’s good to have friends within walking distance to meet up with on Saturday mornings with the kids. The street art in Morden town centre is a nice touch.”

The painted telecoms boxes and colourful shop shutters, created by artists and inspired by the community, are all part of the council’s Meanwhile Action Plan for Morden. This aims to bring colour and vibrancy to the town centre ahead of planned longer-term regeneration. It includes new planters, benches and events like the Christmas lights switch-on in Abbotsbury Road.

At the event, in November, the council announced plans to commit £30m towards its

ambition to remake Morden into a better town centre that works for local people, working with the community to ensure the plans reflect the character and heritage of Morden.

The council is securing a private-sector development partner to work alongside it on the long-term regeneration, which will include thousands of new homes.



Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride and Climate Change, Councillor Eleanor Stringer, said: “We have ambitious plans to transform Morden town centre – to remake Morden. Thanks to a successful company that the council set up and sold, we’ve been able to invest an extra £30m in the regeneration.

“Meanwhile, we’ve been brightening and refreshing the town centre while we develop long-term plans for new homes, a more vibrant high street, a thriving evening economy, plus more sporting, leisure and cultural activities.”



COME IN, WE'RE
OPEN

12



Shop owners welcome 'eyes on the streets'

Safer Streets neighbourhood wardens are becoming a familiar sight for businesses in town centres and on shopping parades across Merton.

The owner of London Glass Art Studio, in Abbotsbury Road, Morden, Alexandra Ghitescu, said: "I believe small businesses greatly benefit from visible patrols, as it adds both a layer of trust for clients coming to the studio in person and it creates a safer environment for my employees to work flexible hours, often necessary for artists. I feel more confident knowing that the wardens are nearby, especially during late afternoons and evenings and I hope that patrols can be increased."

The Safer Streets Team is expanding to include two new wardens from this month.

The uniformed patrols have been out and about on a permanent basis since last July and cover every neighbourhood every week, including evenings and weekends. They provide a visible community safety presence while also dealing with anti-social behaviour and identifying neighbourhood issues that they report to other council services to resolve.

Alexandra said: "There were several disruptions here, including a lot of people dumping piles of trash on the back alley behind

the shop, and even a few instances when strangers would bang on the windows of the businesses on Abbotsbury Road, which made me feel disrespected and scared. A good working partnership between the council and the small businesses will allow our area to grow further to more customers from Merton and beyond."

The Safer Streets Team is one of four pledges the council made to residents to make Merton cleaner, greener, and safer for everyone.

The Council's Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety, Councillor Edith Macauley MBE, said: "Although Merton is consistently ranked as one of London's safest boroughs, we know that some residents don't always feel safe, especially after dark. The Safer Streets Team have already taken positive action across the borough and we are committed to continuing our work to provide reassurance for residents and businesses in Merton."

(L-R) Councillor Edith Macauley MBE and Alexandra Ghitescu with Merton Safer Streets wardens

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography



How local lad is putting Mitcham on the map

“I grew up in and around Mitcham, so many of my early memories are tied to the town centre, from renting games from Blockbuster and grabbing food from McDonald’s, to stopping to admire the motorbikes in shop windows. I’ve seen Mitcham change over time and I also understand the challenges high streets across the country are facing.

I have a genuine love for Mitcham and over the past two years as Mitcham’s Town Centre Manager, my focus has been on creating opportunities for residents to build positive stories and to make memories here. That means putting people at the heart of projects, whether that’s supporting local traders at the monthly Saturday market, co-designing public art, like the community mosaic, or creating a weekly youth space with the council’s youth team every Friday after school.

Feedback from more than 700 residents, through the Mitcham Matters consultation, made it clear that people wanted a town

centre that feels welcoming, social and reflective of the community. The Mitcham Bandstand was a big part of that. We transformed a space on the Fair Green, that many people had felt was uninviting, into somewhere people could gather, perform and celebrate together.

With more than 50 activities in just a couple of months, it has shown what is possible when communities shape their own places. We wanted the bandstand to link back to Mitcham’s heritage, while reflecting the present day – a colourful and vibrant community, and it was fantastic to see the project recognised nationally as a finalist at this year’s Pineapples Awards, run by The Developer and the Design Council.

Encouraging people to spend time in the town centre is already making a difference, with footfall increasing and average spend rising by 35% in 2025, compared to the previous year. Alongside events, we’ve introduced free exercise classes every Saturday morning on the Fair Green and

activities to support health, wellbeing and social connection.

There’s a challenging year ahead for small businesses, so it’s important that we all continue to use our town centre and support our local traders. Try the lunch deals at Gino’s or Chillin 876. Meet friends for a coffee at Pawelek or Forty. Grab some dinner from Livi’s or Colombo. We are lucky to have so many independent businesses here, but for Mitcham to thrive, we must all work together.

Looking forward, there’s plenty to be excited about, including the return of the bandstand this summer, Mitcham Carnival on 7 June and a growing programme of events led by local businesses and community groups, such as Saturday poetry at Naantastic and evening events at Forty. The Saturday market will start again in April, showcasing local small businesses. For me, the proudest moments are often the simplest, hearing people speak positively about Mitcham, or seeing someone point to the mosaic and say, ‘I helped to do that.’”





Free swimming has become part of family life

A free weekly swim has become part of family life for Gavin (on our front cover) from Morden, who brings his children Alfie and Ellie to Morden Leisure Centre.

More than 5,000 hours of free swimming have been clocked up by children aged under 16, since the council's Kids Swim Free scheme was launched in 2023.

The free sessions run at set times every week at the council's leisure centres in Morden, Wimbledon and The Canons, Mitcham, with extra slots added to the pool timetables during the school holidays.

Gavin said: "We've been coming for two years now. Swimming really is a life skill. As well

as helping them get better at swimming, I think it's given them a lot of confidence outside the water too. When we go on holiday, they get to show off, and I feel confident they have the skills they need to both have fun and be safe in the pool. Both of the kids also come to the swim school here, and the teachers are amazing – they really pick up on when a child needs a little more support.

"Alfie started off not being able to swim, but with their help he's just got better and better. Ellie is the same – they're both learning very quickly. I think the extra practice at the free sessions has helped them improve. They still find swimming a challenge, but they really like it and it's something

I think they will keep on doing as they get older."

Ellie, aged seven, said: "I like swimming because you get to go underwater. I can do dolphin kicks and go all the way across the pool."

Her brother, Alfie, aged nine, added: "I like jumping into the water."

Free swimming for specific groups is central to Merton's ambition to become London's Borough of Sport. During term time, Kids Swim Free sessions are held weekly, increasing to daily during school holidays. Free swimming is also available for over 65s and was recently extended to care leavers, plus dementia-friendly sessions.

The council's Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, said: "Kids Swim Free gets to the heart of what Borough of Sport is all about. Not only does it encourage all kids to be active, but this scheme also breaks down barriers for those families who might not be able to afford to swim every week.

"Our work to become London's first ever Borough of Sport has made us a magnet for investment, opening the door to sports-related sponsorships and grants, this has helped us do even more, such as expanding free swimming to over 65s and people with dementia and their carers."

Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah at a Kids Swim Free session at Morden Leisure Centre

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography





How GoodGym combines getting fit with helping others

Teamwork has been key to the success of GoodGym Merton, which launched last year, as a result of a Borough of Sport grant from the council.

GoodGym Merton helps local volunteers combine walking, running or cycling with supporting people and projects across Merton: from tidying a garden that a resident can no longer manage alone, to helping a church provide nutritious, hot meals for those in need.

Volunteer Jade Crafter said: “Giving a true purpose to staying active is a win-win; it’s all the physical benefits of a gym session, but with so much more impact, and making a massive difference to not just physical health, but mental health and wellbeing.

“I see the tangible benefits GoodGym has on our team and the community. On a personal

level, I do it for me, to get outside, stay active and step away from the day job, which is so important to avoid burnout. Every week people keep turning up, so it speaks for itself. Seeing a space completely transformed in under an hour is incredibly rewarding.”

Jade won the GoodGym 2025 Sean Coxhead Inspiring Individual Award for her volunteering.

She said: “There are so many moments that have stayed with

me. From members who just needed a little encouragement to get started, to older residents who tell us how much they’ve looked forward to our visit.

“One moment that really stuck with me was when a new organisation requested our help and asked how much we charged. When I explained that it’s free, they insisted on giving a small donation anyway, and we used those funds to improve our visibility across the borough so we could help more people.”

The council’s Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, Councillor Peter McCabe, said: “Projects like GoodGym show how the benefits of the Borough of Sport reach right into the community, with volunteers teaming up to actively support residents who need a bit of extra help.

“The council has awarded more than 40 Borough of Sport grants to organisations across Merton. Borough of Sport is largely delivered through existing council budgets, but we have also secured funding or funding commitments of over £2m.”



Better protections for Merton's 30,000 private renters

“Facing an eviction was really worrying.” For Greg, a private renter in Merton, the possibility of losing his home – and facing a sharp rent increase – was a real concern.

“These new laws will help people like me feel more secure in our homes,” he said.

Greg is one of nearly 30,000 households renting privately in Merton, where more than a third of homes are privately rented.

From 1 May, new Government legislation will introduce stronger rights and protections for renters.

One of the biggest changes is the end of so-called ‘no fault’ evictions, meaning landlords will no longer be able to ask tenants to leave without giving a reason.

In the past, many renters lived with the fear of being asked to move out at short notice. The new rules aim to give tenants greater stability in their homes.

Landlords will still be able to take back their property in certain circumstances, for example if they plan to sell the property or move in themselves. But tenants cannot be forced out unfairly.

Other protections include limiting rent increases to once a year and requiring landlords to give more than two months’ notice before raising the rent. Tenants will also be able to challenge unfair rent increases at a tribunal.

Rolling tenancies will become the default, giving renters more flexibility. Tenants will also be able to ask their landlord if they can keep a pet in the property – a request that landlords will not be able to refuse unreasonably.

For renters like Greg, the changes could bring much-needed reassurance.

Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development, Councillor Andrew Judge, said: “Merton Council has already taken action to protect private renters. In August, the council used special powers to take control of 18 rented homes after a landlord repeatedly failed to meet basic safety standards. This was one of the first actions of its kind in the country. It is important that you understand your new rights under the law. If you are unsure about your situation, seek advice as soon as possible.”



New school supports pupils with extra needs

Five-year-old Simao is exploring the sensory room at the Bedelsford Chaucer Centre.

He is one of the first pupils to enrol at the brand-new school for children who have Education, Health & Care Plans, which opened in Morden at the start of this academic year.

His dad, Tony, said: “Simao loves to be here and is making good

progress. He has everything he needs and is learning more now. Simao loves singing and music and he counts and says a few words.”

Tony, who is a contract manager for street cleansing services, added: “It is great that the new school opened here in Morden, where we live, and we accepted a place straightaway. It is well organised and you can see that the staff really care about the children – they are friendly and

very kind. Simao is happy to go to school – he runs here and his big sister, Bianca, who is eight, likes to pick him up from school at the end of the day.”

The school in Canterbury Road, which is run in partnership between the council and Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT), is increasing its roll to 74 places for September and will gradually increase its roll further over the next three years.

The council’s Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Education, Councillor Sally Kenny, said: “It is wonderful to have this school in Merton as, otherwise, many of these pupils would have to travel to schools outside the borough to support their needs. One of the reasons why families choose to live in Merton is because of the high quality of education we can offer here. All schools in Merton have Good or better judgements from Ofsted.”

Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa added: “I’m delighted that more pupils with additional needs can now learn in our borough. The opening of the school at the beginning of this academic year happened just days after the council’s Children’s Services were rated Outstanding by Ofsted, maintaining the standard first awarded in February 2022. Merton is one of only a few local authorities in the country to achieve this.

(L–R) Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Sally Kenny, Simao and Tony

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography





The Mitcham Dreamer: Ramz to host stage at festival

“Mitcham is a big community and I’m proud to be part of it. I enjoy Mitcham and I like coming back here.

Seeing the kids here takes me back to my schooldays at St Mark’s Academy and Harris Academy Merton’s sixth form and inspires me to keep on delivering the music to their generation. My school friends from St Mark’s all inspired each other. There was a group of us in music club – a collective. I stay in touch with them on social media and it’s always nice to catch up with people from school.

The town centre is definitely one of my favourite places in

Mitcham. We’ve shot a lot of videos here – the shoot on top of the former Morrison’s car park was wicked. I’ve always said that the best place to shoot is where you’re from and to build something in the community. The video for my song Family Tree was all shot in Mitcham – where else?

You don’t need to travel far for anything – you can get it all in Mitcham. The improvements that are being made in this area right now are very good. You can do so many things in this area. I was proud before to say I’m from here, but I’m even prouder now.

I’ve been thinking about my stage at the Start of the Line Festival in

June every day. If someone asked me in secondary school, I didn’t think I’d be able to have my own stage at a festival, let alone one where I’m from. It means a lot to me. It’s a dream.

There will be a lot of culture and new, up-and-coming artists and sounds that are Afro-fusion and Afro-swing. My aim is to give people who want to make music a platform.

After the Start of the Line Festival, I’ve got another EP dropping and I’m hoping to go on tour in Europe. I’ll be going on the road, but I’ll be coming home to Mitcham afterwards. ”

Ramz

We Are Merton is the borough’s new cultural programme, celebrating local creativity, heritage and community. Its flagship festival, Start of the Line, brings world-class performers into Morden Park, including Soul II Soul, The Hoosiers and Billy Nomates, alongside local talent and hands-on creative activities. Ramz will perform and produce The Mitcham Dreamer stage, showcasing young emerging performers across rap and R&B. This increase in cultural activity is made possible by Cultural Impact Award funding from the Mayor of London, which the council has matched.

Ramone Rochester, known professionally as Ramz

© Suzanne Mitchell Photography



Coca-Cola

The Boss

ME
PIZZA
RESTAURANT

PIZZA
RESTAURANT

Council works with businesses to boost local economy

“Small businesses are facing very difficult times and we are all in the same boat.”

That was the message from Stephan Theron, who runs Waffle Jack’s American Diner in Merton Park Parade with his wife Adele, after local businesses met the council at two breakfast events focused on strengthening Merton’s economy.

Held at Pawelek Restaurant in Mitcham and Bombay Delight on The Broadway in Wimbledon, the business breakfast events brought together entrepreneurs, employers and council representatives for open conversations about the challenges and opportunities facing local businesses.

For Adele, the chance to talk directly with decision-makers was key.

“One-to-one communication is really important for businesses to understand what is going on in the area,” she said. “There are a lot of interesting issues to discuss and it was good to start a dialogue with the council about these.”

The sessions combined presentations with interactive workshops, giving businesses the opportunity to network and share ideas. Participants rotated between discussion tables to explore three main themes: improving high streets and industrial areas, identifying more ways the council can support businesses, and strengthening communication between the council and the business community.

Businesses also heard about initiatives already underway across the borough. These include town centre management, shopfront improvements and events designed to increase footfall on local high streets. Support for employers was also highlighted, including recruitment help through Employ Merton, financial assistance such as London Living Wage grants,

and schemes to help businesses improve their energy efficiency.

The council also outlined its regeneration ambitions for Morden and Mitcham town centres, with plans aimed at creating more vibrant, attractive places for businesses to trade.

For Stephan, making it easier for local companies to grow is crucial.

“The emphasis needs to be on small businesses,” he said. “It needs to be made easier for local small businesses to expand, as growing the local economy generates money for everyone.”

Feedback from the sessions will now help shape the council’s future economic development work, ensuring that the support offered reflects the real needs of local employers.

For updates on how the council is supporting businesses, plus training opportunities, useful resources, information about grants and other funding, businesses can sign up to receive the council's weekly Business in Merton e-newsletter



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There's a membership to match your lifestyle and goals, helping you move more, save more, and feel good every day.

better.org.uk/merton





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Borough of Sport to run new half marathon

The starting gun has been fired to bring a brand-new, closed-road half marathon to Merton in spring 2027.

The race is a collaboration between Merton Council and the Great Run Company – organisers of the world’s biggest half marathon, the Great North Run. Thousands of runners will tackle the 13.1-mile course through Morden, Wimbledon and Mitcham; into some of the best parks in the region; and past some of the world’s most iconic sporting venues.

Former Olympian hurdler and Mitcham resident, Lorna Boothe, said: “As someone who’s spent their career in

sport, I know how events like a half marathon can unite a community. Seeing a new event like this launch here is genuinely exciting and a big step towards making Merton London’s Borough of Sport.

“We have a proud sporting spirit here, and this race will give people of all abilities the chance to challenge themselves. Or people can simply come out to cheer on the racers from the sidelines. I look forward to seeing the streets come alive next year.”

Pancho Pavez, 18, a cross country runner for the Hercules Wimbledon Athletics Club, and London Youth Games competitor, said: “Merton is literally the

perfect location for an interesting competition: beautiful hills and undulations, multiple sports areas of international interest, and well-kept roads – it will make for a fantastic event. Because it’s in such a convenient location, you’ll get competition from all over Surrey and London.

“It’s really exciting that this major event will bring thousands out into Merton, running around the neighbourhoods I know well. I can’t wait!”

Scan for updates about the event and to register your interest:





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FOR THE LATEST COURSE INFORMATION AND TO ENROL: [STCG.AC.UK/ADULT-EDUCATION](https://stcg.ac.uk/adult-education)

Merton College, London Road, Morden, SM4 5QX • mae@stcg.ac.uk • 020 8918 7777

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Connect to Work is delivered in Merton by Ingeus' partners Hestia-Twinning and Royal Mencap Society.





Louise Scannell,
Design Director
at WW+P Architects

New council homes shaped by their neighbourhoods

The first new council homes being built in a generation in Merton are being designed to reflect the character of the communities around them.

Construction has now begun on the first 75 homes. These are being built in Farm Road in Morden, followed by Elm Nursery and Raleigh Gardens in Mitcham.

Although the developments are part of the same programme, each has been designed to respond to its specific surroundings.

“The sites are very different, in terms of context, history and communities living nearby, so we’ve tried to develop a crafted

response for each,” said Louise Scannell, Design Director at WW+P Architects, which is working with the council on the plans.

Community engagement has also helped shape the designs.

“Engagement events and meeting community groups have given us invaluable insights as to what it is like to live around these sites,” Louise said. “It also gave residents the opportunity to review our designs as we were developing them.”

The developments are supported by a multi-million-pound investment from the Mayor of London’s Affordable Homes

Programme, helping the council deliver much-needed homes for local people.

The architects also reflected modern lifestyles in their designs.

“We’ve considered how people use their homes these days, making sure that we’ve incorporated sufficient space for people to work, as well as relax, play and entertain,” Louise added.

“We hope these schemes are going to make a really positive and lasting impact on the communities in which they sit and set really high standards in terms of design quality and sustainability.”

START OF THE LINE FESTIVAL

art culture music

TICKETS SELLING FAST!

Saturday 20 June 2026
Morden Park  Morden
£20 (12 and under free)

SOUL II SOUL
THE HOOSIERS **BILLY NOMATES**

Mitcham Dreamer Stage: produced by Ramz
FlexFM Dance Tent: live DJ sets TBA
Polka Playden: children's area produced by Polka Theatre
Connected Voices Village: featuring Apples and Snakes

Jah Wobble & Special Guests • Hip Hop Karaoke • Attic Theatre Company • Azzures • Baby Rave • Conrad Murray & BAC Beatbox Academy • Debates • Deaf Rave • EMC Indian Folk • MC Grammar • Merton Music Foundation • Metronome Spoken Word Poets • Theatre Performances



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Subscribers can choose between 3 options: 25 garden waste sacks or two types of wheeled bins (240L or 140L). There is a delivery charge of £18 for each new bin we deliver.

We'll send you your containers and the day your waste will be collected. All you have to do is leave them out on your collection day, and we'll do the rest!

SHARE A COLLECTION

You can share your bin or sacks with a neighbour, but the membership remains tied to the paying property. **All waste must be presented outside that specific address for collection.**

ANY QUESTIONS?

Visit merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste to sign up today! or scan the QR code >>

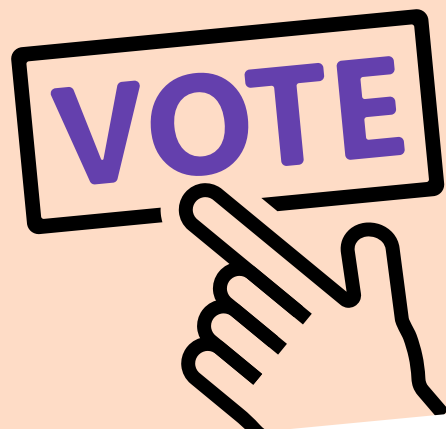


Are you registered to vote at your current address?

Register to vote by 20 April

- **Postal** vote applications must be received by 5pm on 21 April
- **Proxy** vote applications must be received by 5pm on 28 April

Elections for every seat on Merton Council will be held on Thursday 7 May.



merton.gov.uk/voting



Do you look after a family member, friend or neighbour or know someone who does?

Did you know that there is a range of support available for you?

Find out more:
merton.gov.uk/carers



Directory

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 (11am–3pm)

Blue Badge parking permits and Freedom Passes for disabled people

merton.gov.uk/bluebadge

merton.gov.uk/freedompasses

merton.bluebadge@necsws.com

020 3324 1877 (weekdays 9am–5pm)

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 (Weekdays 10am–3pm, except Tuesdays 8am–5pm)

Council Tax

merton.gov.uk/counciltax

local.taxation@merton.gov.uk

020 8274 4904 (9am–1pm)

Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit

merton.gov.uk/cts

housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk

020 8274 4903 (9am–1pm)

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

Electoral services

merton.gov.uk/voting

020 8545 3407

Fostering

merton.gov.uk/fostering

fostering@merton.gov.uk

0800 073 0874

Fly-tipping

Report fly-tipping on public roads.

merton.gov.uk/flytipping

020 8274 4902

Freedom Passes for older people

londoncouncils.gov.uk/freedom-pass

0300 330 1433 (Daily 8am–8pm)

Garden waste collection service

merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste

020 8274 4902

Housing Benefit

merton.gov.uk/housingbenefit

housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk

020 8274 4903 (9am–1pm)

Housing register

merton.gov.uk/allocations

registration@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3305

Leisure

Sports, parks, libraries, events.

merton.gov.uk/leisure

leisure@merton.gov.uk

Licensing

licensing@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3969

Noise and anti-social behaviour

merton.gov.uk/noise-nuisance

MASCOT Telecare

Helps people to live safely and independently in their own homes.

Available 24/7, using technology linked to our response centre.

merton.gov.uk/mascot

020 8274 5940

Parking

Penalty charge notices, parking permits and car parks.

merton.gov.uk/parking

parking@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 4661 (11am–4pm)

Planning

merton.gov.uk/planning

planning@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3777 (1–3pm)

Register office

For weddings, civil ceremonies or partnerships; to register a birth or death; name a baby or citizenship ceremonies.

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

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 and ice

merton.gov.uk/wintermaintenance

trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3700 (10am–4pm)

Street cleaning and graffiti

merton.gov.uk/street-care-cleaning

020 8274 4902

Street lighting

merton.gov.uk/streetlighting

trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3700 (10am–4pm)

Trading standards

merton.gov.uk/tradingstandards

trading.standards@merton.gov.uk

020 8545 3025 (9am–5pm)

£30M for MORDEN DEN

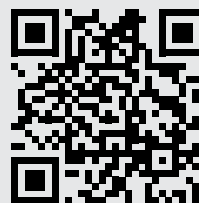


REMAKING MORDEN

Merton Council is committing £30m towards the regeneration of Morden

We're creating a better town centre that works for local people, by:

- building new homes
- developing a vibrant high street
- creating a thriving evening economy
- building a destination for the benefit of the community



Find out more:
[merton.gov.uk/
remakingmorden](https://merton.gov.uk/remakingmorden)



Because we've managed our budgets well, attracted funding into the borough, and paid down debt, we can spend more on what matters to you:

0% increase in the main element of Council Tax because of our freeze

£91.9m to provide care for older and disabled residents

£30m to kickstart Morden's regeneration and give a boost to the whole borough

£5m into fixing potholes and improving our roads and pavements

£1.6m across four years to look after our much-loved parks and green spaces

£2.9m into the upkeep of Merton's schools

£3.4m to improve shopping parades, high streets and town centres

Over £20m across four years for pitches and sporting infrastructure, including a brand new sports hall at Morden Leisure Centre and four new multi-use games areas

Funding the Freedom Pass for more than **12,000** older and disabled residents

More **Safer Streets patrol officers** to crack down on anti-social behaviour

A new **graffiti removal** service for local businesses

Because we've been good with money, we can do more of the things that matter most to you and your family:



More pop-up tips



More Safer Streets patrols



More street cleaning



More town centre improvements



More sports pitches and courts