

Received Saturday 15th October 2016

**Your St. Helier  
Labour Councillors**

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October 2016

Dear Resident,

**Urgent: Consultation on Council Tax increases – please read now!**

This is a very important letter about how much council tax you will pay in the future. Please make every effort to read it and let us know what you think. Whilst we are your local councillors in your local area, and the Leader of Merton Council, we are also your neighbours and care passionately about this community. It's where we live and raise our families.

When Labour was elected here in Merton in 2010 we made a promise to freeze your council tax. We have kept our promise and your council tax has been exactly the same now as it was 6 years ago, which is £1,102 per year on a Band 'D' property (most of us live in Band 'D' properties).

Council tax is perhaps the only big item you have to pay that has stayed the same over the last 6 years, when all other prices have increased including rents, property prices, energy costs, fares, food and so on. We are proud of keeping council tax affordable for you through difficult times, especially when the Conservative Government have hit us so hard. Between 2010 and 2015, they slashed the funding Merton gets from central Government, forcing us to make cuts of £75 million. This really matters because most money spent locally – for rubbish collection, street sweeping, schools, looking after the elderly, child protection, roads and libraries – comes from central Government, with only a fraction coming from the Council Tax.

We've managed to keep freezing Council Tax every year by being business-like in the way we operate, something we promised in 2010. We have burnt the midnight oil and looked at every penny we spend and worked out how we could save money. But, things are getting much worse. The new Conservative Government, elected in 2015 and now led by Prime Minister Theresa May, has told us we will have to make a further £35 million cuts by 2020. That will mean £110m in cuts since 2010 – or £1,375 for each home. It's a big problem.

A further £35 million of cuts will have a big impact on local services but we are also worried if we raise council tax it will become unaffordable for many. Different groups are urging us to increase the council tax from between 1.99% to 3.99% per year.

~~A~~ Some say the easy option is to raise council tax to fend off cuts to services, but even if it was increased by 2% it would only earn us another £1.5 million a year. And remember, the council has faced cuts of £110 million since 2010. Whatever happens, it is a fantasy to believe the council can eliminate cuts by raising the council tax.

Many local families are struggling to get by -

- 1 in 3 local children are living in poverty and we have seen the number of children having free school meals increase by one-third.
- Local families who rent spend an average of £6 in every £10 they earn on housing, with only £4 left to cover food, bills, council tax, fares, school uniforms. Only a minority have had significant wage rises since 2010.
- Food banks have trebled and last Christmas many of us helped a local charity distribute food to 750 local families who could not get through the holidays without help.

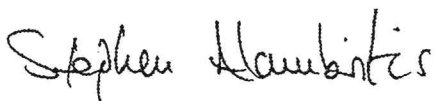
One consequence of putting up the council tax is that when people can't afford to pay, they can get pushed into debt and have to face the courts. Families and the local community suffer and, often, council tax receipts actually go down. It becomes a lose-lose situation.

We are therefore strongly minded not to increase your council tax for the next two years, especially whilst Brexit is being negotiated. We think its best we wait until the UK gets through these difficult negotiations. None of us have a crystal ball but there is always the potential that the UK could go into recession next year as we work out the exit from the EU. We think it's important not to pile on additional pressures here in Merton.

We are writing to you to see if we are on the right track. What do you think? Please answer our consultation by letting us know whether we are right to continue freezing your council tax.

If there is anything you want to discuss in this letter or want to talk about anything locally please pop in to see us. We will be at St. George's Church on Central Road in Morden on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month from 6pm – so this month that is Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October.

Yours Sincerely,



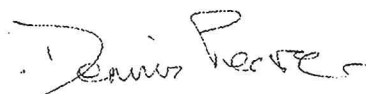
**Cllr Stephen Alambritis – Leader of Merton Council**



**Cllr Imran Uddin**



**Cllr Jerome Neil**



**Cllr Dennis Pearce**

## URGENT: Have Your Say – Council Tax

This is an important consultation on council tax on behalf of your local councillors.

Merton Council has kept its promise to freeze council tax since 2010, meaning you pay the same amount in Council Tax today as you did six years ago. But we want to find out if you agree with this promise, and make sure that you also understand that if we keep council tax frozen, this will mean we have to make some very difficult decisions for this community.

Council tax affects every household in our community, so please complete this form today and pop in the post (no stamp needed). Simply fold on the lines shown.

### 1. Council Tax 2017/18 and 2018/19

Merton has frozen its council tax since 2010, but many other councils are raising theirs. Do you think an increase in your council tax is the best choice for Merton?

YES to an increase in my council tax

NO to an increase in my council tax

### 2. What is the best choice for Merton's overall council tax?

NO to an increase in my council tax, keep it at the same level it is now

YES to an increase of 1.99% of in my council tax  
(this would be an extra £44.31 over the next two years on a Band D property)

YES to an increase of 2% of in my council tax (to be spent on Adult Social Care only)  
(this would be an extra £44.53 over the next two years on a Band D property)

YES to an increase of 3.99% of in my council tax  
(this would be an extra £89.71 over the next two years on a Band D property)

### 3. If you voted YES you must answer this question:

I understand that even if Merton votes for an increase in council tax councillors will still need to make further cuts of at least £16 million to balance the books. Please tick here to confirm your understanding.

### Your details:

For your voice to be heard you **MUST** complete this section. Responses without the following details will not be able to be included:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Third fold back on this line and tuck in flap

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Council Tax and Council Spending Consultation,  
Consultation Team,  
7th Floor  
Civic Centre,  
London Road,  
Morden,  
SM4 5DX.

a) First fold back on this line

b) Second fold back on this line