# Birmingham City Council declares major incident amid waste management crisis



Birmingham City Council has officially declared a major incident as the city grapples with a significant waste management crisis, with an estimated 17,000 tonnes of uncollected rubbish accumulating on streets and public areas. This declaration, made on Monday, March 31, allows the council to mobilise additional resources, facilitating the engagement of extra teams and vehicles to alleviate the growing issue created by an ongoing strike by bin workers.

The strike, now entering its fourth week, stems from a dispute between the council and members of the Unite union over job cuts, specifically the elimination of the Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) position. This dispute escalated when approximately 400 bin workers protested against increasing job insecurity and alleged unfair pay practices, causing widespread disruption in refuse collection operations throughout the city.

John Cotton, the leader of Birmingham City Council, commented on the urgency of the situation: “It is regrettable we have had to take this step, but we cannot tolerate a situation that is causing harm and distress to communities across Birmingham.” He emphasised that while he respects the right to strike, the behaviour of some individuals on the picket line has significantly affected local residents and the environment.

As a result of the strike, the council has noted a troubling increase in the rate of uncollected waste, rising from 483 tonnes per day during the week of March 10 to nearly 900 tonnes per day by the week of March 24. With the disruption caused by pickets blocking access to depots, normal operations have been severely hampered, reducing the number of vehicles available for waste collection to just 90 per day, a stark contrast to the usual 200 vehicles. This inadequate capacity has resulted in collections dropping to 17% of expected levels.

The union has expressed concerns that members are facing potential pay cuts, while the council maintains that its offers are fair, stating, “Not a single worker needs to lose a penny.” Union representatives have asserted that the council could resolve the conflict by addressing workers’ pay adequately, urging the council to negotiate in good faith.

In addition to the immediate health concerns arising from the rubbish backlog, residents have witnessed an increased presence of vermin, prompting further alarm among the community. There have been reports of rats becoming increasingly bold, with some residents claiming to have witnessed rats "the size of cats" rummaging through discarded food waste. This situation has raised public health alarms, with pest control experts warning of extensive risks in urban areas with such overwhelming rubbish piles.

While the council has announced plans to augment waste collection efforts with an influx of 35 additional vehicles, they are also seeking support from neighbouring authorities and the government to help address the crisis. The national minister for communities, Jim McMahon, has voiced support for the steps taken by Birmingham City Council, citing the situation as a public health risk to the city’s vulnerable residents.

The environmental impact of the service disruption is significant, with the council's proposed transformation plan for waste management and intentions to transition to fortnightly bin collections now delayed. John Cotton reiterated the council’s commitment to reforming the waste service but acknowledged that resolution of the ongoing strike is crucial for implementing these changes.

As the dispute continues, dialogue between the council and the Unite union remains stalled, heightening uncertainties about the future of refuse collection services in Birmingham and the well-being of its inhabitants amidst a growing public health emergency.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2025-03-31/major-incident-declared-in-birmingham-over-bin-strikes> - Corroborates the declaration of a major incident by Birmingham City Council due to the ongoing bin strikes and the resulting uncollected waste, as well as the council's efforts to mobilize additional resources.
* <https://news.sky.com/story/major-incident-declared-in-birmingham-as-17000-tonnes-of-rubbish-piles-up-13339391> - Supports the statement that over 17,000 tonnes of rubbish have accumulated due to the strike and details public health concerns such as increased vermin presence.
* <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/492eca/siteassets/publications/benchbooks/evidence/evidbb.pdf> - This source does not directly relate to the Birmingham bin strike situation but discusses legal aspects of evidence, which is not relevant to this specific claim.
* <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Report-of-the-Impeachment-Inquiry-of-Joseph-R.-Biden-Jr.-President-of-the-United-States.pdf> - This source does not correlate with the Birmingham bin strike and is instead related to an impeachment inquiry unrelated to the topic at hand.
* <https://conservativehome.com/2025/03/31/robert-alden-our-plan-to-end-the-birmingham-bin-strike/> - Discusses the impact of the strike and proposes solutions from a conservative perspective, mentioning the severe environmental and public health issues in Birmingham.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source listed as providing the initial information about the Birmingham bin strike but it does not directly link to any specific article corroborating the claims.
* <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/gallery/pictures-piles-filth-prompted-birmingham-31321482> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/bin-strike-birmingham-city-council-major-incident-b2724723.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14555545/Birmingham-City-Council-declares-major-incident-bin-strike-Chaos-17-000-tonnes-waste-uncollected-picket-lines-block-rubbish-trucks-depots.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/major-incident-emergency-declared-birmingham-31321207> - Please view link - unable to able to access data