# Birmingham bin strike escalates into public health crisis as rubbish piles up



In Birmingham, a prolonged bin strike has escalated into a significant public health crisis, with reports of rats roaming freely as waste accumulates across the city. The ongoing industrial action, which commenced earlier this month, has resulted in 17,000 tonnes of rubbish piling up due to a shortage of waste collection services.

The situation has become particularly dire in Small Heath, an area adjacent to Birmingham City's St Andrews football ground. Residents report seeing an average of ten rats per hour as rubbish overflows onto streets and pavements. Local barber Jalaal, 36, expressed frustration, stating that the sight of rubbish affects his mood and raises questions about the value of the council tax he pays. “It angers me, and the worse of it is it makes me think what are we paying council tax for? The binmen are essential workers, and surely the people in power need to step in to address the matter." His comments were reported by The Mirror.

The impact of the strike has led Birmingham City Council to declare a ‘major incident’. This classification allows the council to mobilise additional support from other local authorities and even explore the possibility of military assistance to address the rubbish backlog. The strike has also drawn attention to the council's precarious financial situation, with recent announcements of budget cuts amounting to £148 million due to a £760 million equal pay bill and a significant overspend on an IT project.

With summer approaching, shopkeeper Abdul Haffiz noted a surge in demand for rat traps at his hardware store, with sales increasing by 50% over the past month. This reflects rising anxiety among residents who initially supported the bin workers but are now growing weary of the unsanitary conditions. He remarked, “A lot of people are getting quite stressed now... it’s getting to the point where I think it is flipping.”

The dispute has become a focal point of tension between the council and the Unite Union, which represents the striking workers. The union alleges that its members face potential pay cuts due to changes in job roles, while council leaders assert that their proposals for restructuring are necessary for financial sustainability. Unite spokespersons have voiced their displeasure with the council's handling of the situation, highlighting a feeling of betrayal after a public declaration of a major incident was made without prior consultation.

Council leader John Cotton addressed the situation, describing the strike’s effects as harmful to local communities. Meanwhile, government officials are closely monitoring developments and have emphasised the need for a local resolution to the crisis.

The history of bin strikes in Birmingham adds context to the current turmoil. The city has maintained its waste collection in-house for years, unlike other authorities that have outsourced this service. This longstanding policy has resulted in occasional disputes, with a recurrent theme of financial mismanagement exacerbating the issue.

As efforts to resolve the dispute continue, local residents are left grappling with the consequences of accumulating rubbish in the rising heat, raising alarming concerns about hygiene and public health in Birmingham. The situation remains fluid, with ongoing negotiations between council officials and union members, while residents await a resolution to restore cleanliness and order to their neighbourhoods.

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

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/birmingham-bin-strike-why-are-workers-striking-and-how-long-will-it-last-13339621> - This article supports the claim of a prolonged bin strike in Birmingham leading to a public health crisis and 17,000 tonnes of uncollected waste. It also details ongoing disputes between the Unite union and Birmingham City Council.
* <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/bin-strike-birmingham-city-council-major-incident-b2724723> - Corroborates the declaration of a major incident by Birmingham City Council due to the bin strike, which allows for additional resources to manage the crisis. The article also mentions residents' concerns about rising public health issues.
* <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-bin-strike-rats-overrunning-25726795> - Reports similar encounters of rats in various areas, which aligns with the alarming public health concerns due to the bin strike.
* <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/our-council/budget-and-finances> - Provides context on Birmingham City Council's financial situation, including budget cuts and financial challenges that impact waste management strategies.
* <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/bin-strike-birmingham-city-council-must-reverse-wage-cuts/> - Details the Unite union's stance on the strike, highlighting concerns over pay cuts for members due to changes in job roles, which contrasts with the council's perspective on restructuring.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-65659782> - Describes the ongoing negotiations and tensions between the council and the union, emphasizing the need for a resolution to address public health issues and restore waste services.