# Birmingham faces refuse collection crisis as strike continues



Residents of Birmingham are grappling with a considerable refuse collection crisis, as the city experiences the fallout of an ongoing strike by refuse workers that began on March 11, 2023. The strike, initiated by the Unite union, stemmed from disagreements over proposed changes to pay and job roles that many workers fear could result in drastic wage reductions, some estimates suggesting cuts could reach as high as £8,000 annually for certain employees.

As a consequence of this industrial action, an estimated 17,000 tonnes of rubbish have accumulated in the city's streets, leading Birmingham City Council to declare a major incident earlier this week. Councillor Majid Mahmood, the council’s cabinet member for environment, noted that some areas have gone without waste collection for as long as seven weeks, expressing that it would take several weeks, once operations resume, to adequately clear the backlog of waste.

The situation has raised public health concerns, with reports emerging of large rodents—some described as being the size of small dogs—being spotted amidst the piles of rubbish. Local pest control expert Will Timms commented on the alarming increase in rat populations in the area, observing that the easy access to waste has led to a significant rise in their numbers. “They are the size of small kittens... calls have gone up by 60 percent,” he stated.

In a move to address the growing crisis and expedite waste collection, Birmingham City Council has implemented new measures to facilitate the departure of refuse collection vehicles from depots, including the installation of barriers to manage pickets effectively. Striking workers have previously obstructed vehicles from leaving, exacerbating delays in the refuse collection process. Following the deployment of these barriers, Birmingham City Council reported that most trucks were able to begin operations successfully on a recent morning, marking a shift in tactics amidst the protracted dispute.

While the council has deployed additional cleaning crews in an attempt to manage the accumulating waste, union officials have condemned these efforts as reactive rather than proactive. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham criticized the council’s tactics, stating that the council is squandering public resources while failing to address the core issues of the pay dispute. Graham has repeatedly urged the government to engage with the council decision-makers and facilitate genuine negotiations to resolve the conflict.

The national government has also weighed in on the dispute, with statements from Downing Street urging the union to "negotiate in good faith" and to "drop their opposition" to necessary pay changes aimed at resolving longstanding equal pay issues. Local government minister Jim McMahon recently met with council leaders seeking solutions to the impasse.

Despite the efforts from various stakeholders, the strike continues, with workers like Caroline—who fears homelessness due to expected pay cuts—expressing frustration over the lack of meaningful responses from the council. She noted that many residents support the workers' cause, understanding that the strike is not simply about seeking higher wages but rather about preventing detrimental cuts to their current salaries.

As Birmingham deals with this refuse collection crisis, the implications of the ongoing industrial action extend beyond public health concerns, reflecting broader issues surrounding local governance, worker rights, and the financial management of public services during economically challenging times. The outcome of negotiations between the council and the Unite union—amidst a backdrop of mounting rubbish and rising health concerns—remains to be seen as both parties navigate this complex dispute.

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

## References

* <https://www.left-horizons.com/2025/04/04/birmingham-refuse-strike-why-the-workers-must-win/> - Supports the claim that the strike is over proposed pay cuts and changes to job roles, potentially affecting workers' salaries significantly. It also details the council's response and accusations of smearing strikers.
* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/02/wihx-a02.html> - Corroborates the ongoing strike and its impact on Birmingham, including the declaration of a major incident by the council due to the buildup of waste. It highlights the council's use of commissioners to enforce austerity measures.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko04t2xdjHw> - Provides video coverage discussing the refuse collection crisis in Birmingham and the strike initiated by refuse workers. It highlights the city's financial challenges and the strike's implications.
* <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/17-000-tonnes-waste-pile-birmingham-25671228> - Details the massive buildup of waste and public health concerns, aligning with reports of large rodents and increased pest control efforts.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-worcester-and-hereford-65011211> - Reports on the strike's impact, including the council's declaration of a major incident and efforts to manage the crisis, such as deploying additional cleaning crews.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/31/birmingham-strike-refuse-workers-city-crisis> - Supports the narrative of the strike's broader implications on public services and governance, highlighting the national government's involvement and the tensions between the union and council.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14568123/Thought-Birminghams-bin-strike-bad-1975-Glasgow-walkout-saw-70-000-tonnes-rubbish-fester-streets-Army-called-in.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
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* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/birmingham-bin-worker-striking-over-34992561> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
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* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y4g7pp7d8o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data