# Croydon waste contract chaos leaves rubbish uncollected for seven weeks amid growing public health fears



In a stark illustration of escalating waste management crises, a London borough finds itself grappling with uncollected rubbish after bins went unattended for as long as seven weeks. Streets across Croydon have become cluttered with food waste, sanitary products, and nappies, evoking a "persistent smell of decay" that is troubling residents. As complaints flood in, local politicians are under pressure to respond to a growing sense of frustration among constituents.

The upheaval can be traced back to a new eight-year, £21.5 million contract between Croydon Council and Veolia Waste Management, which commenced at the start of the last month. While Veolia had managed the previous contract, they were supposedly the sole bidders for this new deal. However, the service rollout has been marred by logistical issues, alarming both the council and local residents. Those particularly affected include households that pay for garden waste collection or generate significant amounts of rubbish, who have reported extensive delays and failures in service.

One resident from the Shirley area related her personal experience, highlighting her cumulative frustration over seven weeks of non-collection. "Foxes got to them, and there was just food waste, sanitary towels and nappies all over the road, which we ended up having to clear up," she lamented. This troubling narrative echoes a broader crisis within the borough, where Croydon's local councillor Rowenna Davis voiced serious health and environmental concerns, notably the potential for increased rodent activity and other hygiene issues stemming from the rubbish accumulation.

In an effort to mitigate the situation, a Croydon Council representative acknowledged the ongoing issues while also claiming that 99.5 per cent of collections last month were completed on time. However, many residents remain sceptical of this assertion, given their lived experiences. “As part of launching the new service, we have experienced some teething issues,” the spokesperson conceded, suggesting that efforts were underway to rectify the disruption.

This predicament in Croydon is not isolated. In Birmingham, a similar scenario continues to unfold, where a significant strike by refuse workers has plunged the city into a waste management crisis. After rejecting a proposed pay deal, workers from the Unite union are engaged in an indefinite strike, which has compounded the waste collection issues and contributed to deteriorating sanitary conditions. Despite council claims of having cleared many piles of rubbish, images from various parts of the city depict overflowing bins and uncollected refuse, raising public health alarms.

Indeed, both cities—Croydon and Birmingham—reflect a troubling trend concerning local waste management. Birmingham's ongoing issues are not solely attributed to the strike; they also stem from systemic financial strains exacerbated by historical equal pay settlements. These compounding challenges highlight the pressing need for local governments to reassess their waste management strategies and prioritise effective service delivery.

In Croydon, the expectation remains that improvements will arise from the new Veolia contract, which promises initiatives including a dedicated night-time collection service and enhanced monitoring. However, given the historical context of dissatisfaction with Veolia's prior performance, sceptics question whether this latest attempt will result in meaningful change. The borough was notably cited last year as having some of the filthiest streets in London, evidenced by nearly 32,000 missed collections.

As the dust settles on the disruptive new implementation, the possibility looms that residents' grievances may not merely be rooted in the service disruptions but may also reflect wider systemic issues within public contract management and accountability. A future focussed on cleanliness and efficiency in waste collection demands not only effective partnerships but also responsive governance that prioritises resident satisfaction and well-being.

The challenges posed by the waste management crisis in Croydon and Birmingham underscore a critical juncture for local authorities across the UK. Both councils must address these operational issues head-on, lest they risk further alienating the very constituents they aim to serve.

### Reference Map

1. Background on the waste collection issues in Croydon.
2. Contextual information on Birmingham's waste crisis linked to strikes.
3. Further details on the implications of the Birmingham strike.
4. Historical criticisms regarding Croydon’s past waste contracts with Veolia.
5. Information on the financial challenges faced by local councils.
6. Details on Croydon’s previous disposal of its contract with Veolia.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14710183/Bin-crisis-London-rubbish-uncollected-seven-weeks.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/25e6a8c0-0eff-4655-a22f-1ee94fca80c8> - Birmingham is facing severe waste management issues as bin workers continue an indefinite strike, which began due to disputes over pay and job downgrades. The strike has resulted in piles of uncollected rubbish across the city, affecting local businesses and residents. The root of Birmingham’s financial struggles lies in a historic equal pay settlement and an expensive software contract. The city council's attempts at modernisation, including upgrading the fleet and improving recycling, are hindered by its financial constraints. The council has also rolled out trucks for self-service waste disposal, urging businesses to opt for private waste collection. The situation has drawn criticism from multiple political parties and has led to service cutbacks amid increased council tax. The union Unite's industrial action has placed the broader issue of fair wages and workers' rights in the spotlight, with national implications for Labour's employment policies. The ongoing strike has led to deteriorating sanitary conditions, contributing to health issues like a norovirus outbreak in care homes.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/932a1e7f-8a2e-43d2-b14b-2f59325c7ece> - The ongoing bin strike in Birmingham will continue after Unite union members rejected a proposed pay deal from Birmingham City Council, labeling it “totally inadequate.” The strike, now entering its second month, was sparked by the council’s decision to restructure the waste collection service, a move that includes eliminating the grade three waste collector role. Unite argues that the restructuring could lead to pay cuts of up to £8,000, impacting approximately 200 lorry drivers. The council, which declared effective bankruptcy in 2023 due to financial mismanagement and equal pay liabilities, contends that maintaining the eliminated role would increase its equal pay risk. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner criticized the timing of the union's ballot and brought in military planners to assist with waste clearing logistics, though no military personnel are actively collecting rubbish. The council maintains that it has been engaging in good-faith negotiations and is keeping the door open for further dialogue. Despite efforts to maintain weekly waste collections, the strike has led to significant service disruptions and public health concerns in poorer areas unable to afford private waste removal services. The union insists more comprehensive solutions are needed to resolve the dispute.
4. <https://insidecroydon.com/2024/10/26/londons-filthiest-borough-hands-40m-rubbish-deal-to-veolia/> - Croydon Council has awarded a £40 million contract to Veolia, the waste management company previously dismissed in 2022 due to poor service. The decision has been met with skepticism, especially as Croydon was recently reported as having the filthiest streets in London, with nearly 32,000 missed bin collections in 2023. The new contract aims to improve waste collections for flats above shops, retain alternate weekly collections for households, and introduce a night-time waste clean-up service. Mayor Jason Perry emphasized the importance of cleaner streets and resident satisfaction but acknowledged the need for improved monitoring and accountability in the new contract.
5. <https://insidecroydon.com/2023/06/02/red-alert-over-increased-costs-with-outsourced-rubbish-deal/> - Croydon Council's decision to outsource its waste management services to Veolia has raised concerns about increased costs and service quality. Despite a £22 million contract uplift in 2020 intended to improve services, residents have reported no noticeable improvements. Cost-cutting measures, such as reducing the number of street bins and roadsweepers, have led to increased littering and decreased cleanliness. The council's plan to re-award the contract to Veolia has been criticized, with calls for bringing the service back in-house to ensure better value and service for residents.
6. <https://insidecroydon.com/2022/10/04/croydon-and-three-other-boroughs-to-bin-veolia-rubbish-deal/> - Croydon, along with Merton and Sutton boroughs, has decided to terminate its contract with Veolia due to significant and ongoing concerns over the company's performance. The decision follows the issuance of Service Improvement Notices to Veolia earlier in the year. The councils had previously awarded an eight-year contract to Veolia in 2017, but issues such as missed bin collections and poor street cleanliness have led to dissatisfaction among residents. The councils are now seeking to renegotiate the contract terms or find alternative solutions to improve waste management services.