# Brighton bus drivers join nationwide wave of strikes over pay and working conditions



Bus drivers in Brighton have joined a broader wave of industrial unrest affecting thousands of Unite union members across the UK, with around 7,500 drivers currently striking or balloting for industrial action due to longstanding grievances over pay and working conditions. This recent development marks a significant escalation after several years of tension in the sector.

The dispute in Brighton mirrors similar unrest in cities including Birkenhead, Bristol, Cardiff, Chorley, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Preston, Stoke, and Swindon, where thousands of bus workers have announced or are planning strikes. Recent targeted actions involve 2,000 London United workers in West London, 550 First workers in Bristol, 450 Cardiff Bus workers, and 70 Go South West workers in Swindon. The Unite union reports having managed 167 bus disputes in 2023 alone, involving over 42,000 workers.

Central to the campaign are demands for improvements not only to pay but also to working conditions, such as better rest breaks, access to toilet facilities, and shift pattern adjustments aimed at reducing driver fatigue. Unite highlights the daily challenges faced by bus drivers, including abuse, assaults, and significant mental and physical health strains linked to the stressful nature of their roles. Unite’s general secretary Sharon Graham has voiced strong criticism of current pay levels, stating that they “simply do not reflect the stresses and strains of the job,” and emphasising the union's commitment to fighting for better wages and conditions across the sector.

The situation in Brighton carries historical resonance. After a period of relative calm, including the high-profile resolution of a pay dispute in August 2024 when drivers accepted a 10% pay rise backdated to July, tensions have flared anew. That 2024 deal followed an option for strikes that were eventually called off, highlighting the cyclical nature of labour unrest in the sector. Even earlier, in 2014, a similar stand-off was averted through negotiations that led to a satisfactory pay agreement, underscoring Brighton’s history of tense but ultimately negotiated outcomes.

However, the current wave of industrial action points to deeper, unresolved issues beyond pay alone. The continuing surge in workplace abuse and fatigue, alongside the mental health toll emphasized by Unite, shows that many drivers feel ongoing conditions remain intolerable despite previous settlements. Brighton and Hove bus drivers demonstrated this frustration clearly in May 2025 when 94% voted in a consultative ballot for full industrial action, signalling broad union membership frustration and readiness to escalate if demands are unmet.

This unrest is not confined to Brighton. For example, in Portsmouth, fresh strikes were announced after bus operators attempted to impose pay deals already rejected by workers, with services expected to be severely disrupted during the planned actions. This highlights a nationwide pattern of industrial tensions across the public transport sector, where unresolved negotiations on pay and conditions are leading to repeated and protracted disputes.

In Brighton, company representatives, including Managing Director Martin Harris, have responded positively to some union proposals in past talks but current negotiations appear strained, with strikes looming once again. The company is under increasing pressure to reconcile operational demands with employee welfare and union demands for fairer pay and improved working conditions.

The situation remains fluid, with further strikes and ballots expected in the coming weeks across multiple locations. This broad industrial action wave reflects the mounting frustration common among bus drivers nationally, signalling ongoing challenges for employers and public transport users alike.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.manchesterworld.uk/news/wave-of-bus-strikes-threatened-over-pay-and-conditions-5286758)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.manchesterworld.uk/news/wave-of-bus-strikes-threatened-over-pay-and-conditions-5286758)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23783373.brighton-hove-bus-strikes-called-off-unite-union/), [[3]](https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2014/11/20/brighton-and-hove-bus-drivers-accept-pay-offer-and-lift-strike-threat/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-30144847)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://cbwmagazine.com/brighton-hove-drivers-vote-strike/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/business/first-bus-strikes-escalate-as-company-attempts-to-impose-pay-deal-5006894)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://cbwmagazine.com/brighton-hove-drivers-vote-strike/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25414642.brighton-hove-bus-drivers-threaten-industrial-action/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23783373.brighton-hove-bus-strikes-called-off-unite-union/> - In August 2024, Brighton and Hove bus drivers called off planned strikes after securing a ten per cent pay rise. The deal, backdated to July, was accepted by drivers, cleaners, and storekeepers. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham praised the workers' unity and the substantial victory achieved. The company, owned by the Go-Ahead group, had initially offered a seven per cent increase but later agreed to the ten per cent rise. The strikes would have been the first since 2016, but the dispute was resolved without action. ([theargus.co.uk](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23783373.brighton-hove-bus-strikes-called-off-unite-union/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2014/11/20/brighton-and-hove-bus-drivers-accept-pay-offer-and-lift-strike-threat/> - In November 2014, Brighton and Hove bus drivers accepted a pay offer, averting potential strike action. The company announced that, following negotiations with the Unite trade union and a reballot of staff, the pay offer had been accepted, thus avoiding the possibility of strike action that had been raised the previous week. Managing director Martin Harris expressed satisfaction with the satisfactory pay award for all parties involved. ([brightonandhovenews.org](https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2014/11/20/brighton-and-hove-bus-drivers-accept-pay-offer-and-lift-strike-threat/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-30144847> - In November 2014, a potential strike by bus drivers in Brighton was averted after a pay deal was reached. The possibility of industrial action was raised by 360 members of the Unite union over pay and working conditions. Walkouts were scheduled for 15 and 19 November but were suspended while talks continued. The Brighton and Hove Bus Company stated that a pay offer had been accepted in a new ballot, with managing director Martin Harris expressing satisfaction with the satisfactory pay award for all concerned. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-30144847?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/business/first-bus-strikes-escalate-as-company-attempts-to-impose-pay-deal-5006894> - In February 2025, bus drivers in Portsmouth announced new strike dates after First Bus attempted to impose a pay deal that had already been rejected by workers. The fresh strikes were scheduled for February 25-27, March 3-7, and March 10-11, with the union stating that bus services would be 'close to zero' during these periods. The dispute centred on pay and conditions, with union members expressing anger at the company's actions. ([portsmouth.co.uk](https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/business/first-bus-strikes-escalate-as-company-attempts-to-impose-pay-deal-5006894?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.manchesterworld.uk/news/wave-of-bus-strikes-threatened-over-pay-and-conditions-5286758> - In August 2025, a series of nationwide strikes by bus drivers was threatened due to disputes over pay and conditions. Around 7,500 members of the Unite union were either striking or balloting to take industrial action in areas including Birkenhead, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Chorley, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Preston, Stoke, and Swindon. Strikes involving 2,000 London United workers in West London, 550 First workers in Bristol, 450 Cardiff Bus workers, and 70 Go South West workers in Swindon had already been announced, with further strikes planned in other towns and cities. ([manchesterworld.uk](https://www.manchesterworld.uk/news/wave-of-bus-strikes-threatened-over-pay-and-conditions-5286758?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://cbwmagazine.com/brighton-hove-drivers-vote-strike/> - In May 2025, Brighton and Hove bus drivers voted in favour of a full industrial action ballot, with around 94% of those who voted supporting strike action. The consultative ballot indicated the membership's wish to move to a full legal ballot, which is a necessary step before any industrial action can be taken. The union was considering options and formulating a plan of action, with talks between the union and management continuing. Managing Director Martin Harris commented on the positive commitment to several measures as part of the company's constructive response to the union's concerns. ([cbwmagazine.com](https://cbwmagazine.com/brighton-hove-drivers-vote-strike/?utm_source=openai))