# Union leaders in Birmingham strike controversy as refuse workers face unsanitary conditions



The ongoing strikes in Birmingham over waste collection, which have now reached their sixth week, have become a contentious issue as union leaders at the forefront of the industrial action are revealed to be residing outside the city. The striking refuse workers, represented by the Unite union, have seen rubbish pile high in the streets, causing distress among local residents who contend with unsanitary conditions and an influx of vermin.

Notably, Sharon Graham, the general secretary of Unite, has emerged as the most vocal advocate during the strikes. However, her influence comes from a distance; Graham lives approximately 130 miles away in west London. Residents have expressed frustration, claiming that she and other union executives remain insulated from the challenges they face while living in areas where refuse collection services continue as normal. "They should endure a week here, amongst this rubbish... They don't smell it, why do we want to keep this going," said Muhammed Amin, a local resident.

The situation has been compounded by reports that Graham’s hardline approach may have complicated negotiations, with suggestions that a resolution could have been reached earlier had local union representatives been more prominently included in discussions. Annmarie Kilcline, Unite’s West Midlands Regional Secretary, also resides outside Birmingham—in Beeston, Nottingham—while other key figures, such as Zoe Mayou, live in Nuneaton, approximately 30 miles away. Onay Kasab, a national lead officer, resides even further afield in Welling, Kent.

The impact of the strikes is tangible. Streets in Birmingham, particularly in districts like Sparkbrook, are now seen beset by mountains of waste and the accompanying distress of rising vermin populations. Care worker Farah, 39, articulated her concern over the situation, stating that her children are afraid to play outside due to the presence of rats. The residual refuse has led to widespread dissatisfaction among residents, who report feeling disregarded by union leaders, especially as they watch those leaders advocate from comfortable surroundings with regular waste pick-up services.

In a bid to address the discontent, Birmingham city council, which is currently under Labour management, has made appeals to Unite to reconsider the strikes, asserting that a “very, very fair offer” has been extended to the workers. Craig Cooper, a spokesperson for the council, encouraged Unite to negotiate promptly to restore normalcy in waste management services.

Unite, in response to the backlash regarding their leaders' absence from Birmingham, defended their position through a spokesperson who emphasised the need to protect workers' wages amid what they termed “horrific attacks” on their pay, indicating that some workers risk losing as much as a quarter of their earnings.

As the strikes continue, local residents remain caught in the middle, grappling with the growing piles of litter and a noticeable decline in sanitary conditions while union leaders direct the action from more comfortable locales.

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

## References

* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/15/uubt-a15.html> - This article details the ongoing disputes between Birmingham City Council and Unite union members over proposed job cuts and pay reductions, as well as the union's rejection of the council's offer. It highlights the leadership's role and the impact on workers.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2025-04-14/birmingham-bin-workers-reject-councils-partial-deal-as-strike-continues> - This article reports on the overwhelming rejection by Unite members of a partial deal offered by Birmingham City Council, emphasizing the significance of pay cuts for workers and the ongoing strike.
* <https://news.sky.com/story/military-planners-called-in-to-help-with-birmingham-bin-crisis-as-workers-to-vote-on-partial-deal-to-end-strike-13348558> - Sky News discusses the deployment of military planners to assist with logistical issues during the strike and the ongoing negotiations between Unite and the city council.
* <https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/birmingham-waste-workers-strike-enters-sixth-week-amid-health-crisis-324063> - This article highlights the public health concerns arising from the strike, including rodent infestations, and the efforts of the council to clear the waste backlog.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yceiv6jgOs> - This video discusses the ongoing refuse workers' strike in Birmingham, detailing the large amounts of uncollected waste and public health concerns.