# Edinburgh festival faces fresh disruption as council strikes loom amid pay dispute



Today’s political landscape in Scotland is beginning to echo the discontent of past years, with the spectre of strikes looming once again. University of Edinburgh staff have voted for industrial action amidst disputes over budget cuts and job losses, mirroring a wider trend as tens of thousands of council workers across Scotland's 32 local authorities consider similar steps. This threat raises the alarming prospect that the festive spirit of Edinburgh's renowned festivals could be undermined by rampant strikes.

The Edinburgh International Festival finds itself particularly endangered, recalling the significant disruption of 2022 when refuse and recycling workers initiated a strike that left the city grappling with a mounting waste crisis. Streets filled with uncollected rubbish, overflowing bins, and rising health concerns from rodent populations showcased the disruption’s extent. Although the strike ended with a pay deal, the ramifications severely tarnished the reputation of one of the world’s leading festivals, revealing a government system ill-prepared to handle public sector unrest.

Local businesses, especially along the iconic Royal Mile, are now sounding alarms. They fear that renewed strikes will deter festival-goers and strangle their already fragile livelihoods. One shop owner expressed frustration, stating, "The last thing we need is for Edinburgh to be painted as a city drowning in waste," underscoring the ongoing tension between workers' rights and economic well-being during a critical period for tourism.

Local authorities appear to be caught in a bind. Edinburgh City Council leader Cammy Day, while acknowledging the risks, emphasized residents’ and visitors’ responsibility to manage waste during strikes. “With the festivals approaching, cooperation is crucial to avoid the chaos we witnessed in the past,” he cautioned, revealing a reactive rather than proactive strategy in addressing the looming fallout from what may be an inevitable showdown.

Moreover, the current proposal on the table for council workers—a meagre 3% raise for the 2025-26 financial year—is a blatant insult, especially against an inflation rate of 3.5% as reported by the Office for National Statistics. Contrast this with NHS workers receiving a relatively more generous 4.25% increase, and it becomes clear that the Scottish Government is failing to provide equitable treatment across essential sectors. Roz Foyer, general secretary of the STUC, aptly articulated the gravity of the situation, stating, “This is about people's livelihoods and their standard of living. Unless the Scottish Government is prepared to put a serious offer on the table... they will be left with little choice than to, yet again, stand up for themselves.”

As industrial action looms, the onus is now on the Scottish Government to respond effectively, especially with Holyrood elections on the horizon. The dual pressures of council worker sentiment and the state of local businesses shape a precarious road ahead. Ongoing negotiations between unions and Cosla will be pivotal in determining whether another chaotic festival season befalls Edinburgh or if a solution can be brokered that acknowledges both workers' rights and the economic vitality of the city’s festivals.

Reflecting on past strikes reveals not just logistical failures but broader systemic issues regarding worker treatment and compensation. As the nation heads into an even more contentious political season, both citizens and council officials can only hope that the lessons learned from 2022 will pave the way for a more equitable and preventative resolution before waste management—and public health—becomes an unacceptable focal point yet again.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25181179.will-bin-workers-strikes-hit-edinburgh-festivals/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/23/edinburgh-faces-rat-surge-due-to-refuse-workers-strike-warn-heritage-leaders> - In August 2022, refuse workers in Edinburgh initiated a strike, leading to significant waste accumulation in the city. Heritage leaders expressed concerns over potential health risks, including a surge in rat populations due to the uncollected rubbish. The strike coincided with the Edinburgh International Festival, causing additional challenges for city officials and residents. The situation prompted discussions about the need for improved pay and conditions for council workers to prevent future disruptions.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/30/edinburgh-clean-up-begins-as-refuse-collections-resume> - After nearly two weeks of strike action by waste workers in Edinburgh, refuse and cleansing services resumed on August 30, 2022. The strike had resulted in mountains of uncollected rubbish, attracting pests and creating public health concerns. The council deployed additional resources to expedite the clean-up, focusing on the most affected areas. Despite the resumption of services, further industrial action in the education sector was anticipated, highlighting ongoing labor disputes in Scotland.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw0y4j0gwd8o> - In July 2024, Edinburgh businesses expressed deep concerns over the potential recurrence of bin strikes during the upcoming Edinburgh Festival. The previous strike in 2022 had left streets littered with waste, negatively impacting the city's image and tourism. Business owners, particularly on the Royal Mile, feared that another strike would deter visitors and harm their livelihoods. The article highlights the delicate balance between workers' rights and the city's economic interests during major events.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c06k024p46do> - In July 2024, Edinburgh City Council leader Cammy Day urged residents to take their waste home during planned refuse worker strikes coinciding with the Edinburgh Festival. The council anticipated significant disruptions due to the strikes and recommended that visitors dispose of waste in their accommodations to alleviate pressure on the city's waste management. The article underscores the challenges faced by local authorities in managing public services during industrial actions.
6. <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/edinburgh-bin-strikes-called-off-after-union-reaches-new-pay-offer-from-council-leaders-4738525> - In August 2024, planned bin strikes in Edinburgh were called off after the Unite union reached a new pay offer from council leaders. The strike action, initially set to begin on August 14, was suspended following negotiations that resulted in a minimum cash increase for the lowest-paid council workers. The article details the terms of the new offer and the union's response, highlighting the ongoing efforts to resolve pay disputes within local government services.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cprqg944w02o> - In July 2024, waste and refuse workers in Edinburgh announced an eight-day strike during the Edinburgh Festival, starting August 14. The strike was in response to a rejected pay deal from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The article discusses the unions' stance on the pay offer, the potential impact on the city's waste management during the festival, and the council's response to mitigate disruptions.