

Bin strike – six days on and still no agreement

Staff who work in the council's waste and cleansing departments have been on strike since 18 August. The plan is to continue that strike all the way through to the end of 30 August unless an improved pay offer is agreed. Other workers across Scotland plan strike action from tomorrow.

Unite the union have refused the pay offer which was increased from 3.5% to 5%.

UNISON say that no agreement has been reached Tuesday afternoon despite lengthy negotiations with COSLA, the local government representative body during the day today. Both UNISON and COSLA are to write to the Deputy First Minister to ask for an urgent meeting to discuss increased funding for local authorities to enable talks to continue.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON Scotland's head of local government, said: "It was a very long meeting but unfortunately there has been no breakthrough and we are a long way from a pay offer that we would be able to recommend to our members.

"COSLA negotiated within the cost envelope that leaders mandated them but that simply isn't enough and goes nowhere near matching the pay offer provided to council workers in

England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

“The only thing that both parties could agree on is that we need the urgent intervention from the Deputy First Minister to put additional funding in place and both will be writing to the Deputy First Minister to that effect today.”

The strike in Edinburgh is the first in a series of planned industrial action all over Scotland including Glasgow, Falkirk, Midlothian, Perth & Kinross and North Ayrshire.



Cllr Cammy Day Council Leader PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

We met with Council Leader Cllr Cammy Day to find out what he is doing about the strikes. His view is that COSLA which is headed up by SNP politicians has not moved quickly enough, that they made an increased offer on Friday of last week but did not then meet with the union representatives until today.

Cllr Day said: "This is absolutely the responsibility of COSLA with the trade unions but the decision to put forward the last pay offer was made on Friday and nothing has happened in the last four days.

"I meet every two days with the trade unions to push this along and I have a meeting with my directors of Service every day. I have written to the First Minister asking her to come out on the streets of Edinburgh and join me to see the mess that is in her capital, a city that has an international festival which helps the rest of Scotland, being damaged by the mess on the streets.

"My argument is, as COSLA agreed before, to send it back to the Deputy First Minister asking for more resources be brought to the table. We were told there was no money, but £140 million was found. We went back to say we needed more – and more flexibility on how councils use their finances. We have at least had some commitment to relook at that but as of yet no more money.

"It is a national discussion so every local authority from the Borders to the Highlands will suffer from this. For Edinburgh alone it will cost us millions of pounds to pay an additional pay award and it will simply come from cutting services and cutting jobs elsewhere in the council."

SNP comments on the bin strike

Edinburgh Central MSP and culture secretary Angus Robertson wrote: "From the off, the council had enough money to cover a rise of over 4.5 per cent without needing to look at other finance.

"The budget available for pay rises is in part thanks to Rob Munn, finance convenor of the previous SNP council, who ring-fenced enough money for the single largest pay rise for

council workers in any local authority in Scotland.

“Add to this a further up payment of £140 million from the Scottish Government and Edinburgh Council had the lion’s share needed to take the pay raise offer to a reasonable five per cent, the least our hard-working staff deserve.”

Former Edinburgh Council Leader, Councillor Adam McVey added: “We’ve seen no leadership whatsoever from the Labour, Tory, Lib Dem Administration. It took them a week to put a serious pay offer to unions and in that time we’ve never seen the City look worse. It’s time Labour stop playing politics, stop hiding from accountability and actually start supporting our workers try and resolve this.”

MP for Edinburgh North and Leith, Deidre Brock, commented: “Residents and tourists alike need to see a plan from Labour to clean up the capital starting today. All we’ve seen so far is ineptitude.

“This is not just a shameful eye-sore but is a potential environmental and safety hazard on our streets.

“This is the consequence of the pathetic political games Labour have been playing as they sided with the Tories to try and block a 5% pay increase being offered to council employees.

“If Labour cannot get their act together then they should get out of the way and let the SNP, who were backed in May to lead our capital by people across the city, get Edinburgh back on track.”

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS HAVE THEIR SAY

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader and Edinburgh Western MSP Alex Cole-Hamilton has condemned the SNP for abdicating responsibility for strike action and called for an emergency budget review to deliver more support for local authorities

and ease the cost-of-living crisis.

Mr Cole-Hamilton said: “The way the SNP are handling this whole sorry affair is absolutely appalling. Whether it’s rubbish, the cost-of-living crisis or our healthcare emergency, they don’t seem to be lifting a finger to help anyone.

“It’s depressingly predictable that despite his party slashing council budgets over and over again, Angus Robertson’s first instinct isn’t to offer a solution, it’s to point the finger at others.

“No one wants to live in a dirty, rat-infested city. Refuse workers are being hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis. They need emergency changes to the budget which will properly fund local government and support those in need.

“The Scottish Government must fund local authorities so that they can afford to give workers a proper pay rise and put an end to this mess.”

MEETING of Governance Risk and Best Value Committee (GRBV) ON TUESDAY – URGENT MOTION LODGED

SNP Cllr Kate Campbell, lodged an urgent motion with The City of Edinburgh Council’s Governance Risk and Best Value Committee which met on Tuesday.

This motion, which was passed by committee, narrates what has happened since 12 August and calls for the Council Leader to brief councillors urgently on the discussions being conducted through COSLA along with minutes and information. (The text of the motion is below).

Cllr Campbell said: “We’re into day six of the strikes in

Edinburgh, the rubbish is piling up in the streets, and only now are COSLA meeting with the trade unions to discuss the 5% offer, and how that could be distributed across workers to support those on the lowest pay.

“These discussions should have taken place on day one of the strikes, if not well in advance. But because Labour council leaders voted for a derisory 3.5% offer, we are now knee deep in rubbish before these talks are even taking place.

“It’s important that the council and its scrutiny committee are able to understand the process that led to this poor decision by Edinburgh’s Labour council leader. It was telling that Labour’s Tory and Lib Dem administration partners tried to find reasons not to support this information coming to light.

“However, committee members did agree to an urgent briefing to councillors on the advice the Labour council leader was given in advance of both COSLA meetings where pay offers were agreed, and to details and minutes of meetings with trade unions and COSLA officials.”

Text of SNP’s urgent motion to The City of Edinburgh Council’s Governance Risk and Best Value Committee which was passed on Tuesday:

Notes the ongoing strikes by Unite and GMB members of the waste and cleansing department, and the subsequent impact on the streets of Edinburgh.

Notes that COSLA met on the 12th August and agreed an offer of 3.5%, which the council leader voted for, despite there being an alternate proposal of 5% on the table.

Notes that on the 19th August COSLA met again and this time agreed a 5% offer.

Requests an urgent briefing for GRBV members covering:

The information and advice that was provided to the council leader in advance of the COSLA meeting on the 12th of August

The subsequent information and advice provided to the council leader in advance of the COSLA meeting on the 19th of August

Details and minutes of any meetings the council leader had with the trade unions ahead of both COSLA meetings

Details and minutes of any meetings the council leader had with COSLA officials ahead of both COSLA meetings

Details and information provided to council leader by council officers on the affordability of a 5% pay offer and whether a 3.5% pay offer would have spent all of the available resources Edinburgh Council had in its budget, as well as those additional funds secured from the Scottish Government by COSLA to help meet an increased pay offer