

# **Emergency task force to be formed during strike**

**An emergency council task force is to be formed to look at clearing rubbish in places where there is a “public health risk” amid ongoing bin strikes in Edinburgh.**

The move by Conservative councillors, supported by the Labour administration, could mean that staff are diverted from other departments for street cleansing and collections, as around 250 refuse workers in the capital continue strike action in a pay dispute.

Seven days after the start of the walkouts, overflowing bins and large piles of rubbish are evident around much of the city centre, with the impact also being felt in the city’s suburbs. Some have voiced fears of health risks and increased risk of rat infestations, calling for urgent action to be taken.

The Conservative group initially suggested bringing in contractors to empty bins “assessed as being an immediate risk to public health or safety”.

However, group leader Cllr Iain Whyte said that following a conversation with the council leader there was an agreement to only look at using council employees.

On 9 August more than a week before strikes began, Labour council leader Cammy Day said officers were considering “diverting resources from other teams across the council to help meet demand” as part of a ‘plan B’.

Cllr Adam McVey, SNP leader on Edinburgh Council, accused the administration of using council staff to “carry out the work of striking workers”.

But Cllr Day countered, dismissing the comments as “spin”, adding: “Staff are currently emptying very limited exemptions agreed with trade unions. Only where there are health and safety or public health issues.”

Other measures that will be looked at by the task force include the deployment of any “workable council bins not already in use” and using skips as “collecting points”.

Cllr Whyte said while he understood the wish of staff for a pay rise, councillors should “consider the impact it’s having on Edinburgh’s public and what that means for our national and international reputation”.

He added: “We want to see something done to clear up what is rapidly becoming a health hazard and a safety hazard for all the thousands of people in Edinburgh at the moment, residents and visitors alike.

“We’ve put forward a number of suggestions, some of those to directly clear up the mess, some of those to help the public with information, some of them about how we clean up afterwards.

“So skips as collecting points, we know of an offer from a charitable organisation to do that very quickly if we can get some sites, deploy extra bins if we’ve got any, make sure that when we get to the end of this if people have stuff stored in their garden waste bins, they know that that will be cleared.

“Maybe look at what we do with garden waste permits given that we’ve charged people for those and they’re not getting a service, do something about that.

“And make sure that where there’s an immediate risk around the

bin or on the streets that we do clean it up if it's a risk, and I would encourage the council to look at that in any way we can.

"I've suggested we use contractors as we once did in a previous strike, I know that's not going to go down well across the council because others will see it as breaking the strike.

"We do need to clear up the health and safety issues and if there's a way of doing that, whatever method, we should consider doing it."

**by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter**

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