

# Missed bin collections blamed on group of rogue refuse collectors

Missed bin collections across Edinburgh have been blamed on a group of rogue refuse collectors taking industrial action, as council chiefs warn staff against refusing to pick up kerbside waste or work overtime.

A rising number of overflowing bins have been reported in recent weeks due to delays in the capital's refuse services.

Yesterday the local authority suspended all blue box glass collections for a week to prioritise household waste and other recycling building up.

A trade union claimed the disruptions were due to workers having to start their morning runs an hour later following recent complaints about the noise of glass collections from controversial new 'bin hubs' installed outside flats.

And Unite's City of Edinburgh Council Branch disputed claims refuse collectors in were engaging in wildcat 'work to rule' action.

But it warned growing discontent among its members could make "bin strike mark two" – a repeat of rubbish piling up on the capital's streets during the summer festivals, as it did in

2022 – even more likely as the union prepares to ballot thousands of members across Scotland amid a pay dispute.

It is understood the recent missed collections have come as a result of action by “a relatively small group of staff”.

A source said unions “have made it clear this hasn’t been sanctioned by them” and added managers “are dealing with these performance and conduct issues to make sure the service returns to normal as quickly as possible”.

In a letter seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service the council’s head of neighbourhood environmental services, Andy Williams, said there had been “recent suggestions and/or comments from a small number of staff that routes will not be completed, side waste will not be collected, and a refusal to work overtime where it is offered.

“These actions could be considered to be Action Short of a Strike and potentially a breach of your contract. This can have very serious implications.”

Mr Williams, who sent the letter to workers at the city’s Seafield Depot last week, said he had also been “led to believe that some staff have indicated a willingness to work overtime but are being bullied and intimidated into not doing so”.

He said ‘task and finish’ – where waste collectors clock off after completing their assigned routes – was “instructed to end many years ago and consistent messages have been put out that all staff are expected to work their full contractual hours”.

He added: “Staff are only asked to collect one bin at a time and only cross a road where it is safe to do so.”

The decision to scrap task and finish arrangements, meaning staff must now return to depots to be dismissed

whereas previously they could be dropped off closer to their homes after collections were finished, has contributed to anger among staff at a lack of flexibility by refuse bosses, it is understood.

Graeme Smith, convener of Unite's City of Edinburgh Council Branch, said: "One of the reasons a lot of the routes have been delayed is the routes are getting started an hour later, this is a result of the number of noise complaints the council is receiving and a lot of the issues around glass collection early in the morning."

He said this was the "excuse that's being given by managers for the keys being withheld and the routes being started later".

Unite, Scotland's largest trade union, announced today it will ballot thousands of its members across the country next month over a pay dispute with local government umbrella organisation Cosla. If workers vote in favour then industrial action "could begin from July with major events potentially being impacted during the summer including the Edinburgh international and fringe festivals," the union said.

Mr Smith said: "We're looking at bin strike mark two.

"The discontent within the [Edinburgh] workforce is just going to create greater passion when it comes to industrial action over pay.

"Everything that's going on is localised but we've had more opportunity to speak to people and people are now discontent because of how they've been treated. This works for us because it means when they get the ballot through the door they're going to tick the box and send it off."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter