

Bin strikes in Edinburgh “not inevitable”

Strike action not yet inevitable as union welcomes “positive Scottish government talks”

Unite the union has confirmed on Wednesday that its local government membership involved in waste and cleansing services will take strike action for eight days across 18 Councils if no credible pay offer is tabled before Wednesday 14 August.

Unite has the largest union membership on the verge of participating in a first wave of strike action involving waste workers, street cleaners, and recycling centre operators. Strike action is set to begin at 5am on Wednesday 14 August and end at 4:59am on Thursday 22 August at 18 councils including Edinburgh.

The union welcomed "positive talks" held on Tuesday involving Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet secretary for finance and local government, unions and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

But Unite said that a new 'credible offer' must be tabled 'imminently' and said it would not suspend its scheduled strike action until that occurs.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Thousands of Unite members will take strike action next month unless there is a new credible pay offer put on the table.

"Our membership has waited months for an offer which reflects their professionalism and the dedication which they put into delivering vital local services."

The current COSLA pay offer amounts to a 3.2 per cent increase for a one-year period between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. Unite has said the pay offer 'grossly undervalues' Scottish council workers in contrast with the offer made to UK counterparts. An offer of £1,290 has been made to council workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the National Joint Council (NJC). This equates to a rise of 67 pence per hour or 5.2 per cent for a council worker earning around £25,000 based on a 37-hour week.

In contrast, the COSLA offer of 3.2 per cent equates to £800 or a 41 pence per hour increase. The pay offer difference means that a Scottish council worker would need to earn above £40,000 to match the offer being made to council workers across the UK. This means the lowest paid council workers are being disproportionately hit by COSLA's current pay offer.

Graham McNab, Unite industrial officer, added: "Unite stands ready to enter into meaningful negotiations at any time but our members need to see a significant shift in the coming days to avert strike action. Strike action is not yet inevitable but action from the politicians must be imminent."

"There is a window of opportunity to resolve this dispute but the politicians should be under no illusions that our members will take strike action if necessary to secure the pay offer which they deserve."

Councillor Cammy Day Council Leader in Edinburgh said: "I'm disappointed that negotiations between Scottish Government, COSLA and the unions have so far failed to avert this action across Scotland.

"While acknowledging that talks are ongoing, including yesterday's meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, urgent progress needs to be made if we are to prevent significant disruption during one of the most important and enjoyable periods in Edinburgh's calendar.

"I firmly believe that all council colleagues deserve to be paid fairly for the work they do and have every right to take this action and have their voices heard. As the lowest funded council in Scotland, it's time for the Scottish Government to properly fund our capital city and its services.

"I'm extremely concerned about the impact this will have on bin collections and street cleaning services, as well as the cleanliness of our city. But I want to assure residents that we'll be doing all we can to minimise any impact on essential services.

"We've published advice on our website for residents and businesses on how to safely and responsibly store their waste – and will continue to post updates as the situation develops. I'd ask residents to please share this information with any friends, family or neighbours who may not be online.

"We'll also be writing out to businesses to encourage them to remind their customers that they can return their litter back to their premises for disposal, and to use reusable packaging where possible. We're also working with our transport and hospitality partners to ensure visitors are aware of the strike and its impact on the city.

"I urge the Scottish Government and COSLA to stay round the table with the unions and find a way of averting, what will be, a hugely damaging dispute for Edinburgh – and for Scotland as a whole."



Bin Strikes bring out MSPs at Edinburgh Grassmarket in 2022
Miles Briggs Con
Sue Webber Con
Alex Cole Hamilton LibDem
Foyso Choudhury Lab
Dan Johnson Lab Photo Alan Simpson