



30.6.2023

Potential industrial action

As you may be aware, the 2023/24 pay discussions between Suez (Somerset Council's waste collections contractor) and the Unite union have not yet been successfully concluded.

A 5.8% increase has been rejected by the union and a recent ballot of its members was in favour of industrial action. A further offer of 8% from Suez has also been rejected. Talks continue and we very much hope agreement can be reached.

However, we have been informed that Unite staff intend to take industrial action, starting on Wednesday 12 July.

They would strike for three days each week, Wednesday to Friday, during the four weeks from 12 July to 4 August.

On the other days of the week staff taking action would not work overtime or be involved in catch-up collections, for example on Saturdays.

Approximately 40% of Suez staff in Somerset are thought to be Unite members, but exactly what this means in terms of available workforce on any given day of industrial action is not known.

Although detail is unclear, we would expect widespread, significant delays and disruption that would affect the majority of residents. The disruption will extend beyond the days of industrial action as crews will need to pick up extra, accumulated waste when collections restart.

Our focus is on helping avoid industrial action or resolving it quickly, but we are also contingency planning with Suez to try and minimise the impact of industrial action if it goes ahead.

Three-weekly refuse collections would be prioritised, along with clinical waste collections and collections from communal locations. We cannot, however, guarantee that all these collections will take place on time.

Recycling collections would be affected to a greater extent as their crews are redeployed to support refuse, clinical and communal collections. Though we would do our best to avoid it, the scheduling of the industrial action means some residents could go multiple weeks without recycling collections.

At this stage we do not yet know how garden waste collections will be affected.

Communication and information sharing

The best place for the latest information about disruption and advice on how to cope would be a dedicated page on the Somerset Council website. This page will be created in the coming days.

We know that online information does not suit everyone, but given the fast-changing nature of the situation, online and social media will be valuable tools for providing timely updates.

We intend to raise awareness of the planned industrial through traditional media, newsletters and - where we have them - direct email. Given the fluid nature of the situation, these will be countywide messages and not sent on a daily basis. Please make use of the dedicated webpage – we will send you a link when the page is live.

We would endeavour to share information as quickly as possible and would appreciate your help in passing it on to your communities should it be needed.

All our efforts would be focussed on minimising the impact of any industrial action so all other work would be delayed. We would appreciate it if direct contact with the Waste Services team was limited to essential and urgent matters only.

We will provide you with a further update as soon as possible on the potential for industrial action, our plans to manage it and advice for residents.

Somerset Council, Waste Services