

JAOC INVESTIGATIONS: NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

This final investigative section examines the impact of the council's decision-making on public services, children's safeguarding, and the broader systemic failures that allow mismanagement to persist unchecked. Where resources are diverted, services suffer — and the most vulnerable pay the price.

1. FINANCIAL DIVERSION & SERVICE IMPACT

- **Total identified concern:** £38m–£40m+ in undervalued land sales and connected-party contracts
- **Council Tax rises:** 15.2% over 3 years — above Scottish average — while assets are sold cheaply
- **Frontline cuts despite income squeeze:**
 - Youth services budget reduced by £1.2m
 - Community facilities closed or transferred to community groups without funding
 - Road maintenance backlog increased by £4.5m
 - Care home provision restructured — 3 facilities closed since 2023

Key question: Why raise taxes and cut services while simultaneously disposing of assets below valuation and awarding inflated contracts to connected parties?

2. SAFEGUARDING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- Audit Scotland 2025 rated North Lanarkshire "Weak" in Children's Services — the lowest category
- 1,100+ children waiting for social work assessments — some waiting over 18 months
- Whistleblower reports reveal:
 - Vacancies in key posts left unfilled — budget pressure cited
 - Senior management reorganisation delayed repeatedly
 - External consultants brought in at £1,200+ per day — instead of filling permanent posts

3. THE PATTERN OF FAILURE

Stage	What Happens	Evidence Found
Land identified	Council land earmarked for disposal	Ravenscraig, Coltness, Newhouse, Motherwell
Valuation bypassed	Sold below independent valuation	£5.3m–£6.0m below value
Buyer linked	Purchaser has family/employment links	Higgins, Cowie, McGuigan, McGowan, McAllister
Planning fast-tracked	Permission approved ahead of schedule	Newhouse — value rose £3m instantly
Contracts awarded	Construction/consultancy to firms	£30m+ to Docherty, Ashfield Land, etc.
Interest declared	LATE or NEVER	All 3 councillors failed to disclose
Loss concealed	Classified "commercial confidential"	All major sales hidden
Services cut	Budget gap closed via tax/cuts	15.2% tax rise + youth/road/care cuts

4. AUDIT SCOTLAND — CONSISTENT CONCERNS

"Financial management and governance arrangements require significant improvement. We found inadequate oversight of decision-making and a failure to ensure declarations of interest were made at the appropriate time."

— *Audit Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council Report 2025*

"There is a lack of transparency in how the council makes key decisions. The public cannot hold decision-makers to account when information is withheld."

— *Audit Scotland, Follow-Up Report 2026*

5. FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE INTERNALLY

- Standards Commission for Scotland notified of councillor interests — investigation still pending after 9 months
- Council's own Standards Committee — met twice in 12 months; referred no cases for investigation
- Internal Audit — flagged procurement concerns in 2024 — no action taken
- Whistleblowers report being warned not to raise concerns — fear of detriment

6. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT IS ESTABLISHED

-  Land sold £5.3m–£6.0m below valuation — to connected parties
-  £30m+ contracts awarded to firms with family/employment links
-  Councillors failed to declare interests — then voted on decisions
-  Senior officers joined firms they awarded contracts to
-  Audit warnings ignored year after year
-  Services cut and taxes raised — while connected parties profit
-  Safeguarding rated "Weak" — resources diverted elsewhere

AUTHORITIES THAT MUST ACT

Body	What they must investigate
Audit Scotland	Full forensic audit of land sales & procurement 2020–2026
Standards Commission	Formal investigation into all 3 councillors
Police Scotland	Suspected fraud & misconduct in public office
Scottish Govt	Section 78 Intervention — place council under supervision
PIDA Panel	Protection for whistleblowers coming forward

7. WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

If you work for North Lanarkshire Council and have firsthand knowledge of these matters, you are protected under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. You have the right to speak up without detriment.

Contact us confidentially: www.jaoc.org.uk/contact

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