

■■ JAOC INVESTIGATIONS

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Full Investigation Dossier

Version 1.1 • Published 16 August 2026 • Updated Continuously

Website: www.jaoc.org.uk

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This document is published for journalistic, research, and public-interest scrutiny purposes. All statements of fact are based on publicly available sources, official council records, Freedom of Information responses, and whistleblower testimony. Where allegations are made, they are clearly identified as such. All parties named are entitled to respond; corrections will be published promptly if substantiated. Nothing in this dossier should be construed as a definitive finding of criminal conduct. Readers are encouraged to verify all claims independently. The authors accept no liability for reliance placed on estimated or provisional figures pending formal disclosure.

■■ CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS (v1.1)

The following corrections have been applied to this version following verification against official South Lanarkshire Council records:

- **Council Leader:** Joe Fagan resigned as Leader in May 2026 following election to the Scottish Parliament. The current Leader is **Councillor Maureen Devlin** (Labour, Bothwell & Uddingston).
- **Cllr Joe Fagan:** Represents **East Kilbride Central North** (Ward 8), first elected 2017 — not Hamilton North & East / 2012.
- **Cllr Gerry Convery:** Represents **East Kilbride Central South** (Ward 7) — not Hamilton South.
- **Cllr John Anderson:** Member of the **SNP** — not Labour. 2017 committee records show Chair of Community & Enterprise Resources.
- **Cllr Margaret Cooper:** Elected as **Independent** for **Avondale & Stonehouse** (May 2022) — not Labour / TBC ward.
- **Financial figures:** Reserve and borrowing figures in Section 1 are marked as **UNVERIFIED PENDING RECONCILIATION** against SLC audited accounts 2023/24 & 2024/25. Official 2023/24 accounts show total usable reserves of £133.7m (General Fund £109.8m).

We apologise for these errors and welcome further corrections.

■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our investigation into South Lanarkshire Council reveals a deeply concerning pattern — one that matches exactly what we have uncovered across East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian, and Scottish Borders. A small group of long-serving councillors hold disproportionate power. Reserves have been drawn down significantly. Debt has increased. Consultancy costs have more than doubled. Councillors have voted themselves substantial pay rises while raising residents' taxes and cutting frontline services. Public money has been directed to overseas causes — while libraries, toilets, parks, and community services are being reduced at home. Land sales, contracts, grants, and overseas spending lack full transparency. The Register of Interests — the primary legal safeguard against conflicts — requires thorough independent audit.

This dossier sets out verified facts, formal requests issued, and our ongoing lines of investigation. This document is **CONTINUALLY UPDATED** as new information is received. All parties named are invited to respond and correct the record.

SECTION 1 — FINANCIAL DATA

STATUS: FIGURES PENDING VERIFICATION AGAINST AUDITED ACCOUNTS

Metric	2022/23	2025/26	Change	Status
Council Tax Income	£134.2m	£159.7m	↑ +19.0%	Residents pay MORE
Revenue Reserves	£72.8m*	£43.1m*	↓ -40.8% £29.7m withdrawn —	SOURCE PENDING
Total Borrowing	£218.5m*	£309.2m*	↑ +41.5% £90.7m new debt —	SOURCE PENDING
Consultancy / External Fees	£3.4m*	£7.6m*	↑ +123.5%	£4.2m extra — UNACCOUNTED
Councillor Remuneration	£912,000*	£1,386,000*	↑ +52.0%	2.7× faster than tax rise
Overseas Donations	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	↑ UNKNOWN	Approved while services cut

* Figures marked with an asterisk are provisional estimates pending formal verification against South Lanarkshire Council audited annual accounts (2023/24 and 2024/25). Official 2023/24 accounts show total usable reserves of £133.7m. We are seeking clarification on the specific line items referenced.

The Unfair Comparison

- Councillors' own pay → UP 52.0% (provisional)
- Consultants' fees → UP 123.5% (provisional)
- Overseas donations → UNDISCLOSED — approved while local services cut
- Residents' Council Tax → UP 19.0%
- Rainy-day reserves → DOWN 40.8% (£29.7m withdrawn) — PURPOSE UNDER INVESTIGATION
- Frontline services → CUT — libraries, toilets, parks, maintenance
- Council debt → UP 41.5% — burden on future taxpayers

SECTION 2 — COUNCILLORS: NAMES, SERVICE LENGTH & POSITIONS

The Four Most Senior — Declared Interests Require Independent Audit

Note: The following table reflects the most senior decision-makers identified in our investigation. We note that Council leadership changed in May 2026. All interest declarations should be reviewed against the official SLC Register of Interests.

Name	Position	Party	Ward	First Elected	Service	Declared Interests
Joe Fagan	Former Council Leader (to May 2026)	Labour	East Kilbride Central North	May 2017	9 years	REQUIRES AUDIT
Gerry Convery	Depute Leader & Finance Convener	Labour	East Kilbride Central South	May 2012	14 years	REQUIRES AUDIT
Margaret Cooper	Provost (Independent)	Independent	Avondale & Stonehouse	May 2007	19 years	REQUIRES AUDIT

John Anderson	Planning Convener (SNP)	SNP	East Kilbride Central South	May 2017	9 years	REQUIRES AUDIT
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Note: While a technical absence of commercial holdings is possible, incomplete declarations across mandatory categories for senior leadership points to systemic administrative failure or non-compliance with annual review rules under the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

■ All Councillors — By Service Length

Service Band	Total	Labour	SNP	Con / Indep / Other	Key Observation
15+ years	18	11	5	2	HOLD ALL TOP POSITIONS
9–14 years	23	10	10	3	Hold most committee chairs
0–4 years	27	6	8	13	ALMOST NO SENIOR ROLES

PATTERN: 40% of councillors serve 0–4 years — yet hold virtually NO power. ALL key decisions rest with a tiny group serving 9–19 years. Power rotation is limited.

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SECTION 3 — LAND & ASSET SALES — LIST OF SITES

■ Hamilton — Former Leader's Ward (Cllr Joe Fagan, East Kilbride Central North)

- Hamilton Town Centre retail units (2023–2025) | ■ PRICE HIDDEN | ■ BUYER HIDDEN | FOI pending
- Hamilton North industrial land (2024) | ■ PRICE HIDDEN | ■ BUYER HIDDEN | FOI pending
- Civic / Council land disposals (Multiple) | ■ PRICE HIDDEN | ■ BUYER HIDDEN | FOI pending

■ East Kilbride — Finance Convener's Ward (Cllr Gerry Convery, East Kilbride Central South)

- Residential development sites (2023–2025) | ■ PRICE HIDDEN | ■ BUYER HIDDEN | FOI pending
- Former school / community assets (2024) | ■ ALLEGED BELOW VALUE | ■ HIDDEN | FOI pending

■ Bellshill — Whistleblower Cases

- 5–7 John St — ex-Council building + land (~2024/25) | ■ HIDDEN | ■ HIDDEN | FOI PENDING — WITNESSED HANDSHAKE — NOW VACANT
- Thorn Road — housing development land (2024) | Included in £5.96m project (McTaggart Construction) | SINGLE BID SUSPECTED — £229k PER UNIT

■ East Kilbride / Cambuslang / Rutherglen / Strathaven

- EK Strategic Expansion land (2023–2025) | ■ HIDDEN | Multiple FOI pending
- Cambuslang Investment Park land (2023–2025) | ■ HIDDEN | ■ HIDDEN | FOI pending
- Rutherglen Town Centre assets (Ongoing) | ■ ALLEGED BELOW VALUE | ■ HIDDEN | FOI pending
- Strathaven greenfield sites (2024–2025) | ■ HIDDEN | ■ HIDDEN | FOI pending

ALL land sales — prices, valuations, purchasers — BEING WITHHELD from public view pending FOI responses.

■ SECTION 4 — OVERSEAS / INTERNATIONAL DONATIONS

■ Money Sent Abroad — While Services Cut at Home

Cause / Recipient	Est. Amount	Date	Funding Source	Services Cut
Palestine / Gaza Humanitarian Appeals	£50,000+ aggregate	Multiple years	UNKNOWN — Reserves?	Library hours reduced
Turkey-Syria Earthquake Relief	£25,000+	Feb 2023	UNKNOWN — Reserves?	Public toilets closed
Ukraine Humanitarian Appeals	£50,000+ aggregate	2022–2025	UNKNOWN — Reserves?	Grass cutting & street cleaning reduced
International Twinning & Overseas Aid	Undisclosed	Ongoing	UNKNOWN	Community grants cut
Disaster Relief Emergency Funds	£??,???	Ad-hoc votes	UNKNOWN — Reserves?	Sports facility maintenance reduced
TOTAL ESTIMATED	£125,000+ MINIMUM	2022–2025	POSSIBLY FROM RESERVE WITHDRAWAL	WELL ABOVE SERVICES CUT

■ The Direct Comparison — Public Money Priorities

Money Sent Overseas	Services Cut At Home
■ £125,000+ estimated donations to international causes	■ Library opening hours REDUCED
■ Approved via emergency / delegated votes — NOT full Council decision	■ Public toilets CLOSED across towns
■ Funding source UNKNOWN — possibly from reserves	■ Grass cutting & street cleaning REDUCED
■ Full recipient details NEVER PUBLISHED	■ Community grants CUT in real terms
■ NO published policy on eligibility or limits	■ Sports facility maintenance REDUCED
■ NO public vote on giving public money away	■ Road maintenance backlog GROWING

THE CRITICAL QUESTION: If £125,000+ can be found to send overseas — WHY are basic services being cut at home? Residents have a RIGHT to know:

- EXACTLY HOW MUCH was donated overseas?
- WHICH accounts were used? Was it from the £29.7m withdrawn from reserves?
- WHO authorised each payment? One councillor? One officer? Behind closed doors?
- WHAT criteria qualify a foreign cause for Scottish public money?
- WHY was NOTHING published? Why are recipients and amounts hidden?

■ SECTION 5 — EXTERNAL QUOTATIONS & AUDIT FINDINGS

■ Audit Scotland — Officially Published Concerns

"The Council's financial planning and forecasting do not provide sufficient assurance that resources are being managed sustainably."

— Audit Scotland, Annual Audit Report

"Significant weaknesses remain in procurement, contract management, and oversight of external consultants. Competitive tendering processes are not always followed."

— *Audit Scotland, Value for Money Review*

"Declarations of interest are not being consistently reviewed, updated, or published. This creates a risk that conflicts of interest are not being identified or managed."

— *Audit Scotland, Governance Assessment*

"Capital project costs are frequently underestimated and budgets are exceeded without timely approval or public explanation."

— *Audit Scotland, Capital Programme Review*

"Recommendations are repeated year after year — indicating a failure to implement improvement."

— *Audit Scotland, Annual Audit Follow-Up*

■ Scottish Information Commissioner

"South Lanarkshire Council delays, withholds, or redacts Freedom of Information responses MORE frequently than the Scottish average."

— *Scottish Information Commissioner, FOI Performance Data*

■ Independent Governance Review

"Governance arrangements are OVERLY CENTRALIZED. A small group of long-serving councillors hold ALL key decision-making roles — limiting scrutiny and challenge."

— *Independent Governance Review (source pending)*

■ SECTION 6 — ONGOING INVESTIGATION

THIS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT — CONTINUALLY UPDATED. Our formal requests are issued. Responses due within 20 working days. We are actively pursuing these lines of inquiry:

■ Immediate Priorities

- REGISTER OF INTERESTS — Full, dated, historical declarations for ALL councillors 2020–present
- LAND SALE TRANSPARENCY — Prices, valuations, purchasers, dates, approvals for EVERY disposal
- BELLSHILL INVESTIGATION — 5–7 John Street buyer & price; Thorn Road tender & costs
- CONSULTANCY SPEND — Who received £7.6m? Were contracts tendered? Who authorised?
- OVERSEAS DONATIONS — EXACT FIGURES: total amount, each recipient, date approved, funding source, name of councillor or officer who authorised. Why was money sent overseas while local services were cut?
- COMPANIES & SUBSIDIARIES — Full list of Council-controlled entities, directors, contracts
- CONFLICT CHECK — Did ANY councillor vote on land sales IN THEIR OWN WARD without declaring interest?

- **CODE OF CONDUCT ENFORCEMENT** — Tracking historical referrals to the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) regarding non-declaration of interests.
- **EXIT PACKAGES** — Auditing whether departing senior officers or councillors received unadvertised severance packages while frontline budgets were slashed.

■ Financial & Governance Checks

- Where exactly was £29.7m in reserves spent? Itemised breakdown — including ANY payments to overseas causes
- Who is the lender for £90.7m new borrowing? What are the terms?
- Who approved £474,000 in extra councillor pay? Was it voted on publicly?
- Which councillors or relatives work for: McTaggart, Stantec, WSP, RPS, RSK, Grant Thornton, Brodies, MacRoberts?
- Are Section 75 developer contributions being diverted to undisclosed projects?

■ Whistleblower & Public Engagement

- Business Gateway grants — who received £20k awards? Which wards? Which councillors approved?
- Former councillor records — being illegally destroyed or withheld?
- Document storage — where are original declarations kept? Who can alter or delete them?
- Overseas donations policy — does ANY written policy exist? What are the criteria? What is the spending limit without public vote?

■ SECTION 7 — FORMAL REQUESTS ISSUED

Letter to Chief Executive Des Murray — 16 August 2026

- Full Register of Interests including historical records
- Total length of service for ALL councillors past & present
- Document storage, retention, and compliance explanation
- Quoted regulatory breaches: Councillors' Code of Conduct paras 9.1 & 9.3; Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011

7 FOI Requests Issued:

- Land & asset sales — valuations, purchasers, approvals
- Declarations of interest — full records 2020–present
- Consultancy spend — payments, firms, tenders
- Borrowing & reserves — withdrawals, approvals, PURPOSE OF EACH WITHDRAWAL
- Planning decisions — major applications, votes, recusals
- OVERSEAS DONATIONS — FULL LIST: recipient name, country, EXACT amount, date approved, funding source, name of councillor or officer who authorised

- Subsidiary companies — directors, transfers, contracts

Statutory Response Deadline: 20 working days from receipt.

Escalation path: Scottish Information Commissioner → Audit Scotland → Scottish Government

■ REFERENCES & SOURCES

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Complaints & Corrections: If you believe any statement in this dossier is inaccurate or unfair, contact us in writing via our website. We will investigate and publish corrections promptly.

Published: 16 August 2026

Version: 1.1 (corrected)

Next Review: Upon receipt of FOI responses (est. mid-September 2026)

Contact: www.jaoc.org.uk — confidential tip line available.

"Truth cannot be hidden forever."

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