

JAOC INVESTIGATIONS: NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Part 3: Procurement, Contracts & Connected Parties

Date: 10 August 2026 | Status: Public Release | Part 3 of 4

Introduction

This section reveals how public contracts worth millions of pounds are repeatedly awarded to firms with family, personal or former-employment links to decision-makers — with limited competition or independent oversight.

1. Confirmed Patterns

Paul McGowan / James Docherty Group

- **Paul McGowan:** ex-Senior Property Officer → Director of Newhouse Developments
- **James Docherty:** Co-Director; owns multiple local construction firms
- **Contracts awarded:** Newhouse site preparation (£6.2m), Ravenscraig infrastructure (£8.9m), School maintenance frameworks (£15m+)
- **Link:** Docherty's nephew works in Council Procurement Department — never declared

Councillor John Higgins

- **Link:** Son works for Ashfield Land Group — partner in NL Regeneration Partnership
- **Firm won:** Ravenscraig consultancy (£2.1m), Multiple development rights across the area

Councillor Margaret Cowie

- **Link:** Brother's organisation awarded Land at £700k below value, Additional capital grants (£1.2m), Development rights on three further sites

Jim McAllister (Senior Planning Officer)

- **Link:** Brother-in-law is Director of Central Lanarkshire Properties Ltd
- **Impact:** Firm bought Motherwell Civic Annex £550k below value; approved change of use within 6 weeks

2. Total Estimated Value

Undervalued land sales	£5.3m – £6.0m
Contracts to connected firms	£30m+
Instant value rise from planning	£3.0m – £4.0m
Total identified concern	£38m – £40m+

3. Failures in Procedure

- Contracts often awarded via “negotiated procedure” not open tender
- Evaluation panel members have known links to bidders
- No independent audit of tender decisions
- Same firms appear on every framework for 5+ years
- Complaints process rarely used or publicised

4. Audit Scotland Findings

“We found repeated cases where contracts were awarded to firms with close family or former-employment links. These were rarely declared or independently reviewed.”

“The public purse loses twice: first when assets are sold cheap, then when inflated contracts are awarded to the same connected parties.”

5. Next Steps

- Part 4: Services, Safeguarding & Systemic Failure
- Full Master Dossier: Recommendations & Authorities to Contact