# Former judge warns of costly failures in Scotland’s public inquiries amid SNP inaction



A former top judge has raised serious concerns about the ineffectiveness of public inquiries in Scotland, indicating a flagrant waste of taxpayers' money due to the inaction of SNP ministers on the recommendations from these inquiries. Lord Hardie, who oversaw the extensive £13 million inquiry into the Edinburgh tram project, has called for a new parliamentary body tasked with ensuring the Scottish Government responds effectively to the findings of public inquiries.

According to Lord Hardie, there is a growing perception that these inquiry reports merely “gather dust on ministers’ shelves,” highlighting a shocking disregard for public funds. The financial implications are staggering; public inquiries since 2007 have cost an astounding £230 million, with nearly £200 million tied up in investigations into critical issues including the Covid crisis, hospital safety, child abuse, and the death of Sheku Bayoh.

In his written submission to Holyrood’s finance committee, which is currently probing the cost-effectiveness of these inquiries, Hardie expressed frustration over the inefficiencies encountered during the Edinburgh tram inquiry. He noted that before his appointment, there had been no clear discussions on timelines or budget limits, resulting in mismanaged expectations. The former judge pointed out that then First Minister Alex Salmond's promises of a “swift and thorough” inquiry were made without grasping the complexities, ultimately misleading the public into thinking the inquiry would conclude quickly—a reality that never materialised.

Hardie's frustrations were compounded by the Scottish Government's failure to provide adequate resources, which he argued negatively impacted staff morale and resulted in considerable wasted efforts. He described the initial setup of the inquiry as poorly managed, with “little or no guidance” provided, leading to a frustrating scenario where it felt like the team was “reinventing the wheel.”

Since 2007, five public inquiries have concluded, including those into the ICL Stockline disaster and contaminated blood, while another five, such as those examining child abuse and Covid-19, remain ongoing. These inquiries have come under scrutiny for their astronomical costs, with the Sheku Bayoh inquiry alone ballooning to £24.8 million. The chairman of that inquiry, Lord Bracadale, confirmed a £1 million cost increase over a mere three months.

In the face of these financial management concerns, a spokesman from the Scottish Government insisted that public inquiries are crucial when other means of addressing public concerns fail. They emphasized the role of these inquiries in uncovering facts and learning essential lessons, asserting that public inquiries operate independently and are monitored to prevent unnecessary expenditures.

Calls for greater accountability resonate amid broader discussions regarding the management of public resources in Scotland. The controversies surrounding the Edinburgh tram project reveal a pattern of gross mismanagement; the inquiry unearthed a “litany of avoidable failures” primarily linked to the City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish ministers. As ongoing public infrastructure issues surface, the need for efficient governance becomes increasingly urgent.

The atmosphere surrounding public inquiries in Scotland remains fraught, with citizens and taxpayers demanding accountability for how their money is spent and how findings are acted upon. While the Scottish Government has professed a commitment to considering the recommendations of various inquiries, there is rising pressure for concrete action rather than empty platitudes to placate public disillusionment. It's clearer than ever that only a government accountable to the people will ensure tax pounds are not squandered in the pursuit of ineffective bureaucratic processes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14751417/Former-judge-fears-taxpayers-cash-wasted-inquiry-reports-gathering-dust.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy4nnynq28o> - An article from BBC News detailing the significant costs associated with public inquiries in Scotland, highlighting that nearly £200 million has been spent on four ongoing inquiries. The piece discusses the financial implications and the concerns raised regarding the value for money of these inquiries, which cover topics such as the Covid crisis, hospital safety, child abuse, and the death of Sheku Bayoh. The Scottish government defends the expenditures, stating that these inquiries provide essential opportunities to establish facts and learn lessons.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scotlands-public-inquiries-have-cost-nearly-ps200-million-4764306> - An article from The Scotsman reporting on the substantial financial burden of public inquiries in Scotland, noting that nearly £200 million has been spent on four ongoing inquiries. The piece highlights the breakdown of costs, including £150.4 million in running costs paid by the Scottish government and an additional £36.4 million spent by public bodies participating in the inquiries. The article also mentions £3.3 million spent on the salaries of those chairing the inquiries, which examine issues such as the Covid crisis, hospital safety, child abuse, and the death of Sheku Bayoh.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/edinburgh-tram-inquiry-report-transport-secretary-statement/> - A statement from the Scottish Government's Transport Secretary regarding the Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Report. The statement acknowledges the public's frustration with the length and cost of the inquiry and outlines the government's commitment to considering the report's recommendations. It emphasizes that the government and its public bodies already operate in line with the recommendations and best practices, citing successful infrastructure projects like the Borders Railway and the Queensferry Crossing as evidence of this commitment.
5. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23799520.edinburgh-tram-inquiry-john-swinney-accused-meddling-crisis/> - An article from The Herald discussing the Edinburgh Tram Inquiry's criticism of former Deputy First Minister John Swinney for allegedly 'pulling strings' and meddling in the tram project crisis. The inquiry's report, which cost £13 million, found that the project was delayed and over budget, with only a fraction of the original scheme completed when trams finally started running in 2014. The article highlights the inquiry's findings and the political implications of the report.
6. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23798881.edinburgh-tram-inquiry-reveals-litany-avoidable-failures/> - An article from The Herald detailing the Edinburgh Tram Inquiry's findings, which revealed a 'litany of avoidable failures' attributed to the City of Edinburgh Council, the company set up to deliver the project, and Scottish ministers. The inquiry estimated the total costs of the truncated original project at £835.7 million, almost £300 million over budget. The article discusses the specific mistakes identified by the inquiry and the broader implications for public infrastructure projects in Scotland.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/transport/edinburgh-tram-inquiry-report-lord-hardie-questions-john-swinneys-integrity-as-scottish-minister-discredits-report-findings-4341879> - An article from The Scotsman reporting on Lord Hardie's Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Report, which questions the integrity of former Scottish Minister John Swinney. The report criticizes Swinney and other officials for their roles in the project's failure to deliver on time and within budget. The article includes responses from Swinney and Transport Secretary Mairi McAllan, who dispute some of the report's conclusions and emphasize the government's commitment to efficient public spending.