# Starmer faces test after six Labour ministers quit over policy splits and conduct scandals



Since Keir Starmer formed his government after the July 4, 2024 election, at least six Labour MPs have left ministerial or government roles — a string of departures that has underlined tensions within the party and tested the prime minister’s claim to have restored discipline and stability. The exits have been varied in cause and character: principled policy dissent, personal controversy, disciplinary action and concerns about reputational risk have all played a part. The departures have fed a narrative of a government having to manage both internal disagreement over policy and swift public accountability where conduct or conflicts of interest are alleged.

Rushanara Ali, who had been homelessness minister, resigned after reporting that tenants in a property she owned had been told their fixed‑term lease would not be renewed because the house was to be sold, only for the same property to reappear on the market weeks later at a substantially higher rent. Her spokesperson said the home had been put up for sale and that tenants had been offered the chance to remain until that process concluded; Ali told The Guardian she stepped down to avoid “becoming a distraction” from the government’s work. Press reporting cited by national outlets suggested the new rent represented a significant uplift, and commentators linked the episode to ongoing debates about renters’ protections and the Renters’ Rights Bill.

Vicky Foxcroft’s resignation as a government whip was expressly political. Foxcroft, who previously served as shadow minister for disabled people, told the prime minister in a public letter that she could not in conscience vote for proposed welfare reforms that include cuts to Personal Independence Payment and the health element of Universal Credit. Her departure was presented as a protest at a package the government says will help deliver roughly £5 billion of savings; critics say the measures will hit disabled people hardest and that her resignation illustrated unease inside Labour ranks about those choices.

The most high‑profile policy resignation came from Anneliese Dodds, who left the international development brief after ministers agreed to cut the UK’s overseas aid commitment from 0.5% of gross national income to 0.3% by 2027 — a change the government says will free resources for a substantial increase in defence spending. Dodds warned the reductions would remove vital food and healthcare from desperate people and damage Britain’s international standing; she delayed making her resignation public until after the prime minister’s trip to Washington, underscoring the diplomatic sensitivity of the decision. Her departure was read in some quarters as evidence of the limits to Mr Starmer’s ability to hold together the party’s centre and its more left‑leaning elements.

Not all exits were voluntary. Andrew Gwynne was sacked as a health minister and suspended from the Labour party after a national newspaper published offensive messages he had sent. The reported WhatsApp messages included remarks in which he said he hoped an elderly constituent would die before the next election and made racist and sexist comments about public figures; Gwynne apologised, describing his remarks as “badly misjudged,” and the party launched a disciplinary investigation. The swift action taken by party officials was presented as an effort to uphold standards in public office.

Tulip Siddiq stepped down amid scrutiny of alleged links between members of her extended family and deals in Bangladesh. The prime minister’s standards adviser reported that he had not found evidence Siddiq breached the ministerial code, but nonetheless underlined significant reputational risks; Siddiq denied wrongdoing, said she had declared her interests and told the prime minister that remaining in post would be a “distraction from the work of the government.” Her resignation, framed as an effort to protect the government’s broader agenda, highlighted the tricky line ministers must walk when family or overseas investigations raise questions about political optics.

The Guardian’s round‑up of departures also notes Louise Haigh among those to have left government since July 2024 after questions were raised about a past fraud conviction; reporting on that case has been less detailed than for several of the other exits, but it contributes to the tally of ministerial instability the prime minister has had to manage.

Taken together, these departures expose multiple pressures converging on the government. There is an underlying policy tug‑of‑war — over welfare, aid and defence spending — between ministers and backbenchers who argue different priorities for Labour’s programme. There are also standards and reputational pressures: offensive personal conduct, housing and landlord controversies, and overseas investigations have all required rapid responses, investigations or ministerial resignations. The effect has been both practical, in terms of the need to reshuffle portfolios, and political, in fuelling criticism that the government is distracted at a moment when it is pursuing large, sometimes controversial fiscal reallocations.

In public statements and resignations, several ministers emphasised the desire not to detract from the government’s work; the prime minister has in turn accepted resignations and, where allegations of misconduct were published, instigated disciplinary processes. The stream of departures is likely to shape internal Labour debate and press coverage in the months ahead as the party seeks to reconcile collective government responsibility with individual conscience and to show it can both govern and hold ministers to account.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/homelessness-minister-rushanara-ali-resigns-after-extortionate-rent-hike-claims-13408249)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[7]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-06-19/labour-whip-resigns-over-governments-proposed-welfare-cuts), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpv44982jlgo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7zperkelo)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk2e7x42zo)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpv44982jlgo), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk2e7x42zo)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7zperkelo), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk2e7x42zo)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/aug/08/labour-mps-left-keir-starmer-government-since-election> - Guardian provides an explainer detailing six Labour MPs who have left Keir Starmer’s government since 4 July 2024. It outlines each exit: Rushanara Ali resigned after allegations about tenants and later rent increase at a property she owns; Vicky Foxcroft quit as a government whip in protest at proposed cuts to disability payments; Anneliese Dodds resigned over cuts to the international aid budget to fund defence spending; Andrew Gwynne was sacked after offensive messages emerged; Tulip Siddiq stepped down amid controversy over family ties to Bangladesh’s former prime minister; and Louise Haigh resigned after questions about a past fraud conviction.
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/homelessness-minister-rushanara-ali-resigns-after-extortionate-rent-hike-claims-13408249> - Sky News reports that homelessness minister Rushanara Ali resigned after allegations she evicted tenants from an east London house she owned and then re‑let the property at a substantially higher rent. Sky cites reporting from the i newspaper that four tenants were told their fixed‑term tenancy would not be renewed because the property was to be sold, and that weeks later it appeared back on the market with a £700 per month increase. Ali said she had followed legal requirements and stepped down to avoid being a distraction. The report notes the Renters’ Rights Bill seeks to curb such practices.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7zperkelo> - BBC News reports that Andrew Gwynne was sacked as a health minister and suspended from the Labour Party after a newspaper published offensive WhatsApp messages he had sent. The Mail on Sunday disclosed messages in which Gwynne reportedly said he hoped an elderly constituent would die, joked about someone being ‘mown down’ and made racist and sexist remarks, including comments about Diane Abbott and Angela Rayner. Labour described the messages as unacceptable; Gwynne apologised for his 'badly misjudged' remarks. The BBC notes the party initiated an investigation and that swift disciplinary action was taken to uphold standards in public office.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpv44982jlgo> - BBC News covers Anneliese Dodds’s resignation as International Development Minister in February 2025 after Keir Starmer announced cuts to the overseas aid budget to help fund a large increase in defence spending. Dodds warned the reductions — from 0.5% of gross national income to 0.3% by 2027 — would remove vital food and healthcare from desperate people and damage the UK’s reputation. She delayed announcing her resignation until after the prime minister’s Washington trip. The BBC reports reactions across parties and aid organisations and notes Baroness Chapman of Darlington was appointed to succeed Dodds and details the political implications for Labour.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyk2e7x42zo> - BBC News reports Tulip Siddiq resigned as a Treasury minister after being named in investigations in Bangladesh that alleged members of her extended family benefited from corrupt deals. Sir Laurie Magnus, the prime minister’s standards adviser, said he had not identified evidence that Siddiq had breached the ministerial code, but that reputational risks were significant. Siddiq denied wrongdoing and said she had declared her interests, yet told the prime minister that remaining in post would be a distraction. The BBC outlines the Bangladesh probe’s claims, Siddiq’s responses, political reactions and Keir Starmer’s acceptance of her resignation and potential future developments.
7. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-06-19/labour-whip-resigns-over-governments-proposed-welfare-cuts> - ITV News reports that Vicky Foxcroft resigned as a government whip on 19 June 2025 in protest at proposed welfare reforms that would cut Personal Independence Payment and the health element of Universal Credit. In a letter to the prime minister she said she could not vote for reforms that include cuts to disabled people’s finances and had wrestled with whether to stay and fight from within. ITV notes widespread concern among Labour MPs about the package, the government’s aim to save around £5 billion, and Foxcroft’s prior role as shadow minister for disabled people, which underpinned her decision publicly.