# Keir Starmer’s government faces inquiry over stalled ethics commission and gift scandals



No 10 is currently facing intense criticism for its failure to establish a promised ethics and integrity commission, a pivotal commitment made by Prime Minister Keir Starmer during his campaign. After nearly a year in office, the government's inaction has led the Public Administration Committee to initiate an inquiry aimed at uncovering the obstacles that have hindered the formation of this essential institution.

The establishment of an independent ethics commission was envisioned as a cornerstone of Starmer's Labour government, designed to restore public confidence in the integrity of government. However, nearly a year in, these promises ring hollow as the government has failed to provide any actionable plan for the commission, leaving serious doubts about its commitment to ethical governance and accountability.

While Starmer has introduced a new ministerial code allowing for independent inquiries into ministerial misconduct without the Prime Minister’s backing, this change has not translated into a robust system for enforcing ethical standards. The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (Acoba), aimed at overseeing former ministers' roles, is currently lacking permanent leadership, with the interim chair lacking relevant parliamentary experience. Such gaps only deepen concerns about the efficacy of the government's oversight of ethics amid escalating public scrutiny.

Sources within the government continue to assert that progress is being made on the commission, yet critics argue that voters are not interested in empty promises but demand meaningful actions to combat misconduct. Cabinet Office ministers, such as Abena Oppong-Asare, have attempted to tout improvements, like the new register for gifts and hospitality, but these measures appear superficial to many, especially in light of the significant ethical lapses that have persisted. Notably, former Conservative minister Simon Hoare has called out the government for its alarming lack of substantive progress and highlighted the urgent need for genuine accountability.

The inquiry is set to delve into the stalled establishment of the ethics commission, while also examining deeper issues regarding public trust, particularly given the ongoing scandals surrounding lobbying and ministerial conduct. This scrutiny underscores the fragmented and ineffective ethics enforcement landscape in the UK, where various agencies struggle to deliver a cohesive and effective strategy for maintaining governmental integrity.

Recent controversies involving individual ministers further exacerbate the situation. For instance, Tulip Siddiq, the former economic secretary to the Treasury, recently self-referred to the UK's ethics watchdog concerning troubling allegations connected to her family's past ties to corruption in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, Starmer himself has come under the spotlight for failing to declare substantial gifts, including clothing for his wife valued at over £16,000 from Labour peer Waheed Alli. Such lapses raise serious concerns about Starmer's commitment to transparency and accountability, particularly as he spearheads discussions on ethical governance.

This series of events—a convoluted backdrop of scandal and hypocrisy—only erodes public trust further. Starmer's failure to disclose gifts appropriately places him in a particularly precarious position as he champions the cause of ethics in governance. Critics are increasingly vocal, asserting that his inability to act decisively on ethical standards does nothing but undermine public confidence in political institutions.

As the inquiry unfolds, the government's response to these critical issues of ethical governance will be closely watched. There is an urgent need for transparent action if they are to restore public faith amidst a growing atmosphere of concern and controversy surrounding their integrity and accountability.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/03/keir-starmer-facing-scrutiny-over-failure-to-establish-new-ethics-watchdog> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/03/keir-starmer-facing-scrutiny-over-failure-to-establish-new-ethics-watchdog> - The Guardian reports that Prime Minister Keir Starmer is under scrutiny for not establishing a new ethics and integrity commission, a key manifesto pledge. The Public Administration Committee has launched an inquiry into the lack of progress, highlighting concerns over the absence of a clear plan for the commission and minimal updates since July. While Starmer introduced a new ministerial code allowing the independent adviser on ministerial standards to initiate investigations without the Prime Minister's consent, the overall standards regime remains largely unchanged, with no updates to the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (Acoba), which currently lacks a permanent chair.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/73e2b202-634c-41d6-a7f1-43ae39c0624a> - The Financial Times reports that the UK parliamentary watchdog declined a request by the Conservative Party to investigate Prime Minister Keir Starmer for not declaring over £5,000 worth of free clothing for his wife from Labour peer Lord Waheed Alli. Starmer received advice that these gifts did not need to be declared, even though initial non-disclosure exceeded parliamentary rules. Ensuring transparency, Starmer’s team proactively sought advice on two occasions. The Conservatives had demanded a probe, citing previous infractions where Starmer failed to register interests on time, highlighting recurring issues with adherence to parliamentary rules. The Financial Times reported Starmer accepted £76,000 worth of free items since the 2019 election, the highest among MPs, causing additional concern about transparency.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/bc6afcbe3c71021a3727091152d8330a> - The Associated Press reports that Tulip Siddiq, the British Treasury economic secretary responsible for anti-corruption efforts, has referred herself to the UK government's ethics watchdog after news emerged of her connections to her aunt, Sheikh Hasina, the ousted Bangladeshi prime minister. An anti-corruption investigation in Bangladesh linked Siddiq's family to a corrupt deal involving a 2013 nuclear power plant project with Russia, with accusations of embezzling significant sums of money. Additionally, reports surfaced that Siddiq had used London properties tied to Bangladesh's Awami League party, led by Hasina. Despite these allegations, Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed faith in Siddiq's integrity. Siddiq, who denies any wrongdoing, has requested an independent review of the matters to clear her name. She has also postponed her planned trip to China for a UK government delegation as the investigation proceeds. Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh’s longest-serving prime minister, was ousted in August 2024 following a violent uprising and currently faces multiple serious charges while in exile in India.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-pm-breached-parliaments-rules-over-clothing-donations-wife-sunday-times-2024-09-14/> - Reuters reports that British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been found to have breached parliamentary rules by not declaring that Labour Party donor and wealthy businessman Waheed Alli bought high-end clothes for his wife, Victoria. The Sunday Times reported that while donations received by Starmer from Alli, including glasses, work clothes, and accommodation, were declared on his registered financial interests, the clothes given to his wife were not. Starmer, who has been in power since July, faces an investigation for this omission. A spokesperson for 10 Downing Street stated that they sought advice and believed they were compliant upon entering office, but have since declared additional items. The Conservative Party is calling for a full investigation into these alleged breaches of the House of Commons code of conduct.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/6a58f7ec-9f06-4647-81f2-1f5155b778a4> - The Financial Times reports that Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has faced scrutiny for receiving £16,000 in clothing from Waheed Alli, which was misreported as donations. This comes in addition to previously reported gifts totaling £76,000, including significant amounts from Alli, a Labour member and ex-chair of Asos. The misreporting has raised questions about Starmer's transparency and adherence to the rules on declaring gifts. Starmer initially categorised the clothing under 'any other support' but later changed it to 'gifts, benefits and hospitality' following advice. Critics argue this undermines trust, especially given Alli's advisory role to Sue Gray, Starmer's chief of staff, and his temporary Downing Street pass. Starmer and top cabinet ministers have vowed not to accept clothing in office to avoid conflicts of interest.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-politician-alli-under-investigation-by-lords-commissioner-2024-10-02/> - Reuters reports that British Labour politician Waheed Alli is under investigation by the Lords Commissioner for possibly failing to register his interests according to parliamentary code of conduct. As a member of the House of Lords, he is required to disclose such information. The investigation was announced on the parliament's website on Wednesday. Alli, a significant donor to the Labour party, is at the centre of a donation scandal involving Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Recently, Starmer and his ministers faced criticism for accepting donations from Alli for clothing, parties, and travel expenses. Following the controversy, Starmer declared he would no longer accept donations for clothing, and similarly, Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner and Finance Minister Rachel Reeves also announced they would stop accepting them.