

Keir Starmer's Adherence to the Ministerial Code



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This summary provides a quick-reference guide to Keir Starmer's adherence to the Ministerial Code (also called the Accountability Charter). It highlights the key rules designed to strengthen democratic accountability, ensure transparency, and prevent

abuse of power. The Prime Minister's performance in these areas from July 2024 to late 2025 is analysed (and his performance is unremarkable!).

Key Provisions of the Ministerial Code

The ten provisions of the Ministerial Code are as follows:

1	Extended PMQs	Weekly Prime Minister’s Questions expanded to 60 minutes, plus monthly thematic PMQs.
2	Oversight Committee	Quarterly appearances before a cross-party oversight committee.
3	State of the Nation	Annual address with cross-party questioning.
4	Duty of Direct Answers	Written follow-up within 72 hours if questions are not answered directly.
5	Truthfulness Obligation	Knowingly misleading Parliament is a statutory offence.
6	Accountability Commissioner	Independent officer to investigate misleading or withheld information.
7	Citizens’ PMQs	Annual Q&A session with randomly selected citizens.
8	Media Engagement	At least four unscripted press conferences per year.
9	Transparency	Publish Cabinet decision summaries (excluding security matters) and an annual ethics report.
10	Sanctions	Non-compliance may lead to reprimand, loss of salary, resignation, or legal action.

Performance of Keir Starmer

Keir Starmer’s performance in the implementation of the ten provisions of the Ministerial Code is as follows:

1. Extended PMQs

Status: So far ignored

PMQs remains at its conventional 30-minute weekly slot. There is no public record of a shift to 60 minutes, nor of an additional monthly thematic PMQs being introduced.

One change has been that Starmer uses his opening “engagements” remarks more aggressively to set the tone and embed government messaging.

2. Oversight Committee

Status: So far ignored

No record that Starmer has committed to or made regular appearances before a cross-party oversight committee dedicated to holding the Prime Minister accountable. No standing mechanism seems to exist in that form.

3. State of the Nation

Status: So far ignored

There was no instance of an annual prime ministerial address followed by structured cross-party questioning. There is no public record of that format being adopted.

4. Duty of Direct Answers

Status: So far ignored

There is no formal rule, mechanism, or commitment to ensure that unanswered parliamentary or other questions are answered in writing within 72 hours.

5. Truthfulness Obligation

Status: So far ignored

Currently, in UK parliamentary practice, misleading Parliament is governed by the Ministerial Code, which states that ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament are expected to resign. However, this is a political standard rather than a statutory crime. There is no legislation on the books making it a criminal offence, so lying to Parliament seems quite acceptable.

6. Accountability Commissioner

Status: Partially implemented with limited progress

Under the new (2024) Ministerial Code, the independent adviser on ministerial standards has stronger power, including the ability to initiate investigations without needing the Prime Minister's prior permission. More significantly, the government has proposed (and scheduled) a new Ethics and Integrity Commission that will oversee ethics in public life and issue annual reports.

However, the Ethics and Integrity Commission is explicitly not designed to investigate individual cases of misconduct or misleading statements. Its functions are more about oversight, advice, and reporting, not direct enforcement.

Thus, the “independent officer”, in a sense, as one with the power to investigate individual misleading/withholding cases, is only partially implemented (via the adviser mechanism).

7. Citizens’ PMQs

Status: So far ignored

No public record or announcement by the Prime Minister holding an annual Q&A with randomly selected citizens (a kind of citizens’ jury or “town hall” format). It has not been instituted.

8. Media Engagement

Status: Not reliably implemented

While Starmer has made press appearances and had informal Q&As (for example, his first press conference as PM was relatively open), there is no commitment or consistent practice to hold at least four entirely unscripted, free-format press conferences annually. No schedule or guarantee of that type has been published.

9. Transparency

Status: Partially implemented in a limited form

The new ethics architecture (through the Ethics and Integrity Commission) will include annual reporting on the state of public ethics and standards in government. In Cabinet decision summaries, the tradition and norms of British government maintain a strong “collective responsibility” and confidentiality around internal Cabinet deliberations and dissent. The Ministerial Code still states that internal advice and dissent should not normally be disclosed. No evidence was found that the government has begun publishing regular summary accounts of Cabinet decisions (beyond what ministers individually announce). So, while ethics reporting is moving forward in a broad sense, the kind of transparency over Cabinet decisions you propose has not taken hold.

10. Sanctions

Status: Not institutionalised at the promised severity

Under the current system, non-compliance with ministerial standards is met primarily via reputational consequences, political sanction, or expectations of resignation. The Prime Minister alone retains a lot of latitude in deciding whether to act. The reforms proposed around ministerial severance do include new rules: for instance, ministers found to have seriously breached the code may be asked to forgo or repay severance payments. But there is no legal framework currently in place that enforces automatic loss of salary or legal penalties for non-compliance as a norm. In short, the idea of binding consequences (beyond political ones) remains largely unfulfilled.

Overall Summary and Verdict

As of late 2025, almost none of the Ministerial Code has been fully complied with, although some small steps have been taken and proposals remain aspirational — essentially not yet delivered.

Starmer published a revised Ministerial Code in November 2024, with stronger provisions and a more independent investigation mechanism for possible breaches. His government has faced pressure (e.g. over the dropped China spy case) about transparency and ministerial accountability, but no investigation has publicly concluded that he personally violated the Code. A clearer ethics test occurred around Angela Rayner, who was then his deputy and was found to have breached the Code over underpayment of stamp duty and subsequently resigned. Some commentators saw this as a test of Starmer's standards system.

Conclusion

The Ministerial Code ensures that the Prime Minister remains accountable to Parliament, the media, and the public. By guaranteeing truthfulness, open questioning, and transparency, it strengthens trust in democratic leadership. Unfortunately, Keir Starmer has not, so far, fully met his responsibilities under the Ministerial Code.