# Criminal Cases Review Commission faces crisis as leadership failures prolong wrongful imprisonments



The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), the entity tasked with addressing potential miscarriages of justice in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, finds itself in a compromising position, facing severe criticism and calls for an urgent leadership overhaul. Following a scathing report by the House of Commons justice committee, there are mounting pressures for Chief Executive Karen Kneller to resign immediately. Her leadership has been marred by egregious failures, with the protracted wrongful imprisonment of individuals like Andrew Malkinson starkly illustrating the CCRC's descent into dysfunction.

The committee’s report highlights Kneller’s provision of “unpersuasive” evidence concerning the CCRC’s processes, particularly the failure to release a review by Chris Henley KC associated with Malkinson's case. After spending 17 years imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, Malkinson’s plight exemplifies a “spectacular failure of leadership” within the CCRC, raising serious questions about the organisation’s ability to rectify miscarriages of justice.

Malkinson’s frustration with the CCRC and Kneller’s lack of action on compelling new evidence is palpable. After an agonizing battle for justice, it is clear that Kneller’s tenure has contributed to an appalling backlog of wrongful conviction appeals, raising alarming concerns for stakeholders across the justice system.

Adding to the discontent, Kneller’s defense of her participation in costly training sessions abroad has sparked outrage. Many view these expenses as a gross misallocation of resources, revealing a striking lack of accountability and strategic foresight within the CCRC.

Andy Slaughter, chair of the justice committee, has been unequivocal in his denunciation, asserting that the current leadership not only persistently fails to learn from past mistakes but also obstructs the crucial oversight role of the committee. “The committee cannot perform our scrutiny function if witnesses provide incomplete or partial responses to our questions,” he emphasized, reflecting the dire need for reform.

The recent resignation of Helen Pitcher in January 2025 amid similar criticisms further underscores the deep-seated issues within the CCRC. Initially perceived as a scapegoat, Pitcher’s departure highlights systemic dysfunction that demands urgent attention. The reliance on remote working methods has become increasingly disconnected from the evolving public expectations and operational needs across the public sector.

Demands for an interim chair have been met with promises from the CCRC to engage more thoroughly with the justice community, but the persistent evidence of miscarriages of justice calls for nothing less than a comprehensive reform to address systemic problems rather than superficial leadership changes.

The recent overturning of Peter Sullivan's wrongful murder conviction after an astonishing 38 years serves as a painful reminder of the pervasive failings entrenched within the CCRC. Prominent voices, including Labour peer Charlie Falconer, stress that while forensic testing has advanced significantly, the CCRC should have revisited cases as new techniques emerged, bringing the promise of justice into sharper focus.

The CCRC’s struggle under intensified scrutiny raises the critical question of whether the current leadership can effect the thorough overhaul necessary for an institution meant to uphold the integrity of the justice system. The stakes could not be higher; ensuring that such injustices are not repeated calls for an urgent and transparent effort, resonating through its leadership and institutional practices. The public deserves better, and reform must become a priority as the CCRC attempts to regain its credibility.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2025/may/23/mps-call-on-criminal-cases-review-commission-chief-executive-to-resign> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/article/2024/jul/19/andrew-malkinson-ccrc-criminal-cases-review-commission-karen-kneller> - In July 2024, Andrew Malkinson, who was wrongfully convicted of rape and spent 17 years in prison, called for the resignation of Karen Kneller, the Chief Executive of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). Malkinson criticized Kneller's role in mishandling his case, highlighting that she was the director of casework when his initial application to overturn his conviction was rejected. He expressed frustration over the CCRC's failure to act on new evidence and the prolonged legal battle he faced. Kneller's leadership was further scrutinized due to the CCRC's broader issues in addressing miscarriages of justice.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c20k6eqyzrwo> - In January 2025, Helen Pitcher, the Chair of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), resigned amid criticism over the agency's handling of the Andrew Malkinson case. Malkinson, who was wrongfully convicted of rape and spent 17 years in prison, had previously called for Pitcher's resignation. Pitcher claimed she was made a scapegoat, but Malkinson dismissed this assertion, stating he knew what it was like to be a scapegoat. The resignation followed an independent panel's conclusion that Pitcher was unfit to lead the CCRC due to its failings in Malkinson's case.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/ccrc-miscarriages-justice-wrongful-conviction-appeal-b2626594.html> - An investigation revealed a surge in the backlog of wrongful conviction appeals at the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). Data from the Ministry of Justice showed that the CCRC failed to refer more than 33 cases back to the Court of Appeal in any of the past three years, while simultaneously rejecting over 1,000 applications annually. This raised concerns about the CCRC's effectiveness in addressing miscarriages of justice, especially in light of the Andrew Malkinson case, where the CCRC's delays and mishandling were heavily criticized.
5. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/uk-news/2025/01/14/a-scapegoat-over-malkinson-case-criminal-cases-review-commission-boss-resigns/> - In January 2025, Helen Pitcher, Chair of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), resigned, stating she was made a scapegoat over the Andrew Malkinson case. Malkinson, who spent 17 years in prison for a rape he did not commit, had previously called for Pitcher's resignation. He criticized the CCRC for obstructing his fight for justice and called for a complete overhaul of the organization. The resignation followed an independent panel's conclusion that Pitcher was unfit to lead the CCRC due to its failings in Malkinson's case.
6. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/chief-accused-of-half-hearted-defence-of-review-body-after-malkinson-case-6NM7F2BK3NJTZNVBQCMH6MIE5Y/> - In April 2025, Karen Kneller, Chief Executive of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), was accused of providing a 'half-hearted' defense of the organization following criticism over the Andrew Malkinson case. Malkinson, who was wrongfully convicted of rape and spent 17 years in prison, had previously called for Kneller's resignation. The CCRC faced scrutiny for its handling of Malkinson's case, with calls for leadership changes and reforms to address systemic issues within the organization.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/18/justice-secretary-sack-criminal-case-review-boss/> - In July 2024, the Justice Secretary announced plans to seek the removal of the Chair of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), Helen Pitcher, following a review that found serious failings in the Andrew Malkinson case. Malkinson, who was wrongfully convicted of rape and spent 17 years in prison, welcomed the news, stating that Pitcher had 'proved herself utterly unfit to lead the CCRC.' The review revealed that the CCRC failed to act on new evidence and missed opportunities to correct the miscarriage of justice.