

New fingerprint agency 'not ready'

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POOR preparation for the launch of a new crime-busting agency could lead to criminals escaping justice, police chiefs warned yesterday.

Created in the wake of the Shirley McKie fingerprint fiasco, the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) is due to start up on April 1.

With an annual budget of £70million and a staff of about 1,300, it will take charge of processing fingerprints, forensics and other criminal records for the country's eight forces.

But senior officers fear a lack of readiness could see some criminals slip through the net through failures to check or follow up evidence.

A report by Strathclyde Police Chief Constable Sir William Rae warns that preparations for the SPSA so far have been 'highly unsatisfactory'.

He said: 'Potentially, the prosecution of crime and the administration of justice in Scotland could be seriously compromised.'

Jean McFadden, convener of the board which runs Strathclyde Police, has written to Justice Minister Cathy



Embarrassing case: Shirley McKie

Jamieson expressing 'deep concern' over the possible consequences.

A Scottish Executive spokesman said: 'There is no question of any delay in establishing the SPSA or any discontinuity in the support services provided to Scottish police forces.'

Former detective Miss McKie was awarded £750,000 in February after being wrongly accused of leaving her fingerprint at a murder scene.