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Criminal record chiefs criticised by McKie report

SENIOR managers at the Scottish Criminal Record Office have been blamed by MSPs for bungling the Shirley McKie case.

A report by Holyrood's Justice 1 committee has concluded there was an 'arrogant and oppressive' culture at the top of the bureau.

It also criticises recently departed Lord Advocate Colin Boyd - who decided to prosecute Miss McKie for perjury - and successive justice ministers.

Former Strathclyde Police detective Miss McKie won £750,000 from the Scottish Executive after being wrongly accused of leaving her thumbprint at a murder scene.

But the report will satisfy nobody involved as it neither suggests finger-

'Managers given a good kicking'

print officers were guilty of criminal conduct nor exonerates them.

Last night Nationalist MSP Alex Neil welcomed the committee's findings but called for a full public inquiry to get to the bottom of the scandal.

He said: 'What started off as an honest mistake mushroomed into a huge cover-up and conspiracy.'

'They (the SCRO) could not admit they made a mistake. I think they are to blame but I don't think they are the only people to blame.'

He queried the role of Strathclyde Police and asked why Lord Boyd had chosen to prosecute Miss McKie on such flimsy evidence.

A draft copy of the report will be given to MSPs this week, with a final version to be published later this year.

A source close to the committee

confirmed senior SCRO managers have been given 'a good kicking' in the document.

Much of the criticism in the report is directed at Hugh Ferry, the head of the bureau at the time of the murder case in 1997.

The report alleges that there was an 'oppressive culture' in the SCRO's Glasgow office and concludes this led to experts refusing to change their minds over the supposed identification of Miss McKie's fingerprints. The four officers who made the match have since maintained it was accurate.

The practice of allowing fingerprint evidence in court despite disagreement among experts is also criticised.

Lord Boyd, Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson and her predecessor Jim Wallace are attacked for the time taken to settle the case.

But the report, after a five-month inquiry, does not support accusations by Miss McKie's supporters that fingerprint officers acted criminally.

Iain McKie, Shirley's father, said: 'Despite the best intentions of the committee, the inquiry has been flawed

from the start. Only a judicial inquiry can possibly get to the bottom of this case.'

Mrs Jamieson has rejected calls for a public inquiry.

The committee set out to establish whether the fingerprint service is fit for purpose. But it was not given all the papers it wanted, notably the report by former Tayside deputy chief constable James Mackay, which alleged criminality and cover-ups by SCRO officers.

Cash award: Shirley McKie won £750,000 from the Scottish Executive

