

Compensation should be paid to Shirley McKie

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I should like to comment on the letters (April 9) on the Shirley McKie case. First, Allan Bayle, a world-renowned fingerprints expert, is absolutely right in saying that Shirley McKie's case and others demonstrate the need for a completely independent examination of the Scottish fingerprint and forensic services and consideration of separating them from police control.

Indeed, late last year, as a result of outside independent fingerprint experts demonstrating yet again that the Scottish Criminal Records Office had got it badly wrong in a High Court case in Ayr, I asked the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee under Annabel Goldie, MSP, to carry out an inquiry into this whole sorry mess. I pointed out to the committee that the new biometric fingerprinting system to be introduced by the SCRO in conjunction with the Crown Office could further bring the whole system into disrepute if proper training and adequate resources weren't provided and in particular if the existing inefficiencies, which are becoming more glaring by the day, are not rectified.

The arrogant attitude of the secret society which runs the SCRO, Crown Office, Strathclyde Police et al needs to be made much more open and accountable. The old-boy network will no longer suffice if we are to serve the needs of true justice in Scotland.

Unfortunately, the committee decided not to take matters further. I now urge Annabel and her committee to reconsider this decision and hold a wide-ranging inquiry, covering all these issues and looking at what should be done to restore the reputation and reliability of Scotland's fingerprinting and forensic services.

The letter from Gordon Ford of Newton Mearns displays an amazing disregard for the principles of natural justice. Shirley McKie was wrongly accused. She took appropriate action in trying to sue Strathclyde Police for a malicious prosecution. She is absolutely right to go on fighting for natural justice.

The key questions for Strathclyde's chief constable are: why has he not afforded his ex-employee the degree of natural justice she should have expected; why, under the very special circumstances of this case, is he not using his discretion to waive the claim for legal costs; why has no-one been disciplined for bringing the fingerprinting service and Strathclyde Police into disrepute; has he investigated whether any member of his force criminally tried to persuade Shirley McKie to lie or commit perjury by stating wrongfully that the fingerprint under question was hers; if no investigation has taken place why not; if it has what was the outcome?

It's time that the chief constable tried to restore the badly beaten reputation of Strathclyde Police. It is also time that the justice minister overruled the old-boy network in her department and ordered a full public inquiry into the role of both the SCRO and Strathclyde Police in this whole sad and sorry affair. What was the point of Jim Wallace publicly apologising to Shirley McKie when he and his successor are standing idly by and allowing her to be persecuted by these public agencies?

Far from claiming legal costs they should be paying Shirley McKie compensation for the damage to her health and the loss of her career which Strathclyde Police and the SCRO, with the latent if not actual connivance of others in the Scottish Executive, have caused.

Alex Neil, MSP, The Scottish Parliament.

IT is a bizarre Alice in Wonderland world in which we live when Shirley McKie loses her job, her health and now faces bankruptcy for telling the truth. Meanwhile, the four SCRO experts

who misidentified her fingerprint and another print continue in their jobs, without any public explanation as to how they could have got it so badly wrong not just once but twice.

Over four investigations for Frontline Scotland and Panorama, I have spoken to dozens of fingerprint experts around the world who cannot understand how these misidentifications were allowed to be presented as fact in court. It appears that even some experts within the SCRO disagreed with the original identification, yet the case was allowed to proceed.

Two years ago the lord advocate, Colin Boyd, QC, praised the BBC investigations into the Shirley McKie case for uncovering "serious defects in the analysis of fingerprinting at the SCRO". He admitted that we had "forced the authorities to act to ensure that such a case would not happen again". But when will he, the Scottish Executive and Strathclyde Police act to stop this vicious persecution of a woman who has shown herself to be model of integrity throughout her ordeal? Remember, Shirley McKie did nothing wrong. The SCRO did.

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