

## **Inquiry ordered over print evidence dispute**

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An inquiry is to take place following concerns over disputed fingerprint evidence used in the criminal prosecution of a serving detective, it emerged yesterday.

The Scottish Criminal Records Office said its executive committee had decided to invite the Chief Inspector of Constabulary to carry out an independent assessment of the evidence used in the case against Strathclyde Police officer Shirley McKie.

The decision followed an earlier meeting at which the Association of Chief Police Officers, Scotland (ACPOS) unanimously recommended that action.

Mr William Robertson, Chief Constable of Northern Constabulary and president of ACPOS, said: "Following the considerable speculation in the media about the circumstances regarding the fingerprint evidence in this case, members are anxious to ensure the integrity of fingerprint evidence to the courts in the future and, particularly, they wish to affirm their confidence in the Scottish Criminal Record Office and its expert staff."

The decision to back an inquiry came in the wake of a letter signed by all 14 civilian fingerprint experts at Lothian and Borders Police who wrote to the Scottish Executive making clear they had serious misgivings about the fingerprint evidence against Ms McKie.

The letter, criticising the SCRO, stated: "At best, the apparent 'misidentification' is a display of gross incompetence by not one but several experts within that bureau.

"At worst it bears all the hallmarks of a conspiracy of a nature unparalleled in the history of fingerprints."

The SCRO holds details, including fingerprints, of every criminal case in the country and acts as a fingerprint identification bureau for a number of Scottish police forces, including Strathclyde. It has been asked to report on the case.

Ms McKie was arrested in 1997 and charged with perjury after police allegedly found her thumb print at a murder scene, in a room she claimed never to have entered.

She was cleared by a jury at her trial last year when it discounted SCRO evidence and accepted the evidence of two American fingerprint experts who argued the thumb print was not hers.

Ms McKie, who resigned from the police after the trial, yesterday said: "I'm obviously really pleased - it's a pity it has taken eight months after the trial to get here."

"I'm hoping it will be a full, open inquiry and totally independent."

A spokesman for the Crown Office said: "The Lord Advocate is in receipt of a letter from a group of fingerprint experts from Lothian and Borders police force and has responded to that letter."