

Wallace urged to act in fingerprint case

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CAMPAIGNERS demanded last night that Jim Wallace, the justice minister, use his powers to end what they claim have been five years of "inhuman and degrading" treatment of Shirley McKie, the former Strathclyde detective who was cleared of perjury after her fingerprints were allegedly found at a murder scene.

The calls followed yesterday's announcement by the Crown Office that no legal proceedings would be taken against four fingerprint experts from the Scottish Criminal Records Office (SCRO) accused of criminal conduct by Ms McKie.

Mike Russell MSP and Iain McKie, Ms McKie's father, are calling for Mr Wallace to organise talks with William Rae, chief constable of Strathclyde, and officials from the SCRO to bring the case to a conclusion. They also want Ms McKie to receive a formal apology from Mr Rae, as well as recognition of her right to financial recompense.

Evidence from the four officers who have been suspended from duty since August last year led to Ms McKie's arrest in 1998, and subsequent trial at the High Court in Glasgow in 1999.

Ms McKie's own investigative work led her to track down Pat Wertheim, an American fingerprint expert. The jury accepted Mr Wertheim's claim the print found at the murder scene did not belong to her.

The chief inspector of constabulary said at the time the fingerprint bureau at the SCRO was not "fully efficient and effective" and listed 25 recommendations for improving the service.

The Crown Office said last night there was not enough "admissible evidence" to justify commencing proceedings against the four officers.

Ms McKie's complaints against the officers were investigated by the regional procurator fiscal at Paisley. The report was then examined by Crown counsel who instructed no further proceeding should be taken.

It also emerged yesterday that Mr Rae had confirmed in a letter to Mr Russell that his force intends to defend any civil action undertaken by Ms McKie.

The MSP last night described the McKie case as a "major miscarriage of justice". He said: "This has gone on for too long and has damaged the reputation of the Scottish legal system. Jim Wallace should use his authority to bring people together. Every day he delays is another day of suffering and delaying justice."

Mr McKie said: "I am fed up watching Shirley being brutalised and brought down by a system which is wrong and won't admit it is wrong." His daughter said she now had no option but to pursue a civil action.

A spokesman for Strathclyde police said last night: "As there are still live matters surrounding this issue it would not be appropriate to comment at this time."