

The Scottish Fingerprint Service

The problem

In January 2000 when 14 fingerprint experts from Lothian and Borders Police openly signed a letter to the Minister for Justice asking for an enquiry into the SCRO and justice for Shirley McKie they performed an act of integrity, courage and honesty.

Unfortunately like many whistleblowers before them few of their careers subsequently prospered. This was an act of self interest, arrogance and weakness by a police management bent on protecting the system and themselves with no regard for truth or justice.

The fact was and remains that the vast majority of Scottish fingerprint experts exhibit all the qualities shown by the '**Lothian and Border's 14**'. They are honest people working to maintain an efficient and effective fingerprint service for the police, courts and general public. They are intent on ensuring that the new **Scottish Fingerprint Service** is, unlike the SCRO, open and accountable.

Unfortunately, if the mainly anonymous contacts I receive from Scots experts is to be believed, far from learning from the SCRO experience that very organisation is hell bent on imposing its culture and practices on the new Scottish service.

Unable to speak out openly for fear of experiencing the covert punishment suffered by the '**Lothian and Border's 14**' some have had the 'frighteners' put on them and it has been made clear what the likely results will be should they speak out.

The Allegations

- That the development of the Scottish Fingerprint service is being determined by some of the people responsible for the SCRO debacle.
- That despite being ridiculed throughout the fingerprint world **SCRO** personnel, culture and procedures are being imported into other Scottish bureau often against local wishes.
- That incestuous relationships have existed between senior Scottish police officers and heads of SCRO that have held the service back and have led to employment decisions detrimental to the future of the new service
- That fingerprint experts have been warned by senior police officers and Scottish Fingerprint Service management that they should not comment on the Shirley McKie case.
- That non-expert heads of regional bureau have been employed from the business world, are out of touch with the real problems and are having the wool pulled over their eyes by police and SCRO personnel.

If these serious allegations are true they mean that the much vaunted new service is blighted from the offset.

Solutions

- Experts must speak out so that the media, public and politicians are aware of what is being carried out in their name.
- A full open and independent enquiry must be carried out into the allegations made by the experts.
- Responsibility for the Fingerprint service must be removed from the Police and given to a new Scottish Forensic Service independent of the police in every way.

How will it be done?

As in-house complaints are unlikely to bring any result a petition in the name of **Scottish Experts** should be submitted on the Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Information on procedures can be found on the Scottish Parliament website.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/petitions/index.htm>

It is critical however to gauge the strength of feeling before such a petition is launched as the fear experienced by the experts about the consequences of speaking out is very real - the action taken against the **'Lothian and Border's 14'** is testimony to this.

As a starting point the views of any experts contacting me as a result of this article will be collated and published after being edited to ensure total confidentiality and anonymity. Once experts have been given the opportunity to comment and the strength of opinion has been assessed the experts themselves can decide what action is appropriate.

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