

SHIRLEY'S SHOCK AT ADMISSION

Chief constable said detective should receive compensation

by Brian Hossack

STRATHCLYDE'S top cop warned almost five years ago that former Troon detective Shirley McKie could expect financial compensation.

The former policewoman - wrongly accused of lying while under oath at a murder trial - has fought a six year battle to clear her name and win recompense from the Scottish Criminal Records Office.

But a letter written by Strathclyde Police Chief Constable Willie Rae to the Scottish Executive in 2000 - obtained by her father, Iain, under the Freedom of Information Act

revealed that Mr Rae had admitted Ms McKie suffered "substantial harm" as a result of the charges, of which she was later cleared of.

It also backed her claim that a fingerprint found at the home of murder victim Marion Ross in 1997 was not hers.

Former CID officer Ms McKie lost her position with Strathclyde Police after the SCRO claimed her thumbprint was found at Marion Ross' home. She was cleared of lying on oath in 1999 after insisting the print was not hers - a claim since backed by international fingerprint experts.

Although Mr Rae, who was the chief constable of Dumfries and Galloway at the time and wrote the letter in his capacity as Chairman of the SCRO Executive committee, has consistently refused to comment publicly on the case, he warned the Scottish Executive that "if not sensibly addressed", the case would cause

"embarrassment" to the police service, ministers and the SCRO.

He wrote: "There can be no doubting that Miss McKie has suffered substantial harm as a consequence of this episode. The bottom line is that Shirley McKie will receive financial restitution and, whatever the sum, the money will come from the public purse.

"I suspect ministers and the public will not be impressed if it appears that progress to a settlement is being impeded because of a dispute over who has responsibility for SCRO."

The letter stressed to the Executive that the case needed to be resolved but since then, officials have refused to admit that a mistake was made and Miss McKie has been forced to take her claim through the courts.

Miss McKie said she was shocked to read the letter. She said: "I was absolutely flabbergasted. This was the chief constable, who can see what's happening, and he's begging for something to be done about it and nothing's been done.

"It was just so bizarre to read that. It was amazing that this was written five years ago. If a chief constable's being ignored, what chance do the rest of us have? Miss McKie brought two court actions claiming "malicious prosecution", one against Strathclyde Police, which she lost in 2002 on the grounds she could not prove the police acted maliciously, and one for £750,000 against Scottish Ministers, who are ultimately responsible for SCRO, which will finally be heard in February. Currently, her lawyers are trying to negotiate an out-of-court compensation settlement with the Scottish Executive. She added: "Perhaps knowing what was in that letter could have made a difference to the case against the police. But who knows. Certainly, knowing about it could have helped."

After losing the case against the Strathclyde force, she was forced to pay £21,000 in legal costs last year. Her father Iain said: "If Willie Rae had been listened, years of trauma and hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money could have been saved." An executive spokesman said the case was sub judice because of the ongoing civil action.

