Scottish Criminal Record Office and Scottish Fingerprint Service Inquiry

I refer to the above and your letter dated 30th June 2006, inviting me to submit written evidence to the inquiry being conducted by the Justice 1 Committee. While I welcome the opportunity to submit evidence, my response is made as a retired Director of SCRO and without the benefit of having direct access to original documentation recorded during my period as Director. I have, however, been advised by SCRO that all relevant documentation has been made available to the Committee and the detail recorded therein will assist in clarifying specific areas.

In addition, I am aware that ACPOS has made a detailed response which is available on the Scottish Parliament Justice 1 Committee website. I have reviewed that response which, in particular, highlights the reviews which were instigated and the outcomes of HMIC Inspections. I acknowledge the accuracy of that document and, as such, I will, where appropriate, make reference to areas of that response where it provides clarification or further detail. It is, however, my intention to try to recall the actual circumstances surrounding specific areas referred to in your letter.

In that regard, I have been invited to respond to five specific areas, namely:

Could you confirm the period in which you were head of the SCRO?

I was appointed Director of SCRO in November 1998, and at that time I was a Detective Chief Superintendent with Strathclyde Police.

In April 2003, I retired as a police officer and at the invitation of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS), and with the endorsement of the Scottish Executive Justice Department, I accepted a contract to remain as the civilian Director of SCRO. This addressed the immediate continuity needs of the organisation and was subsequently extended to April 2005, when I retired from the post of Director of SCRO.

It may be of interest to the Committee to note, that my appointment as Director of SCRO in 1998 followed on a review that I conducted on behalf of ACPOS, regarding the implications for the Scottish Police Service of legislation surrounding Part V of the Police Act 1997. This referred to the disclosure process, as now fully operated by 'Disclosure Scotland' with oversight management from SCRO. At the time of my review the position of ‘Head of SCRO’ had been vacant for some time. I recognised the challenges that this new legislation would bring to the Scottish Police service and the changes and strong leadership that SCRO would require to introduce to ensure that the organisation was in a position to provide this new service.
2. Could you provide an account of your involvement in relation to all investigations and reviews in relation to the identification of mark Y7?

Prior to my appointment as Director of SCRO in November 1998, I had no involvement in the police investigations surrounding the death of Marion Ross which had occurred in January 1997 and I had no personal knowledge of Shirley McKie. I am aware, that SCRO Fingerprint Bureau examined crime mark Y7, during February 1997 and, as indicated, I was not in charge of SCRO at that time.

Following on my appointment as Director of SCRO in November 1998, my first awareness and involvement in the circumstances surrounding Shirley McKie, was some time after the 14th May 1999, following on the conclusion of the ‘Perjury’ case in which she was found ‘Not guilty’. I was aware that there was a great deal of media speculation regarding the fingerprint evidence presented in the case, in that the evidence of American fingerprint experts was that the mark in question was not that of Shirley McKie’.

In view of the media speculation, I immediately directed that the Deputy Head of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau and the Quality Assurance/Training Officer re-examine the crime mark, referred to as ‘Y7’ and they then confirmed to me that in their opinion the mark had indeed been made by Shirley McKie.

I then arranged for an early meeting with the prosecuting Advocate and Deputy Crown Agent. It was my intention to establish if there were any areas in the fingerprint process which needed to be reviewed and in particular to confirm that the stated case on which fingerprint evidence is presented in court was still acceptable. This meeting took place on 20th May 1999, at Pitt Street Glasgow.

The Prosecuting Advocate commented that nothing in this case affected the legal framework surrounding fingerprint evidence; however, the projection facilities used in the court by the SCRO fingerprint experts was an area which could be reviewed.

It was clear that the Crown, were satisfied with the fingerprint evidence of the SCRO experts and indeed their credibility and the integrity of experts at the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau. In addition, the Crown indicated that they were aware that there were independent fingerprint experts, some of whom had been engaged by the defence, who actually agreed with the SCRO identification, however, it had not been possible to trace and introduce these witnesses at such a late stage in the trial.

There was also evidence that Shirley McKie had been in the area of the locus and comment that there had been a previous incident involving her which had been excluded by the trial judge. In addition, the judge had apparently made comment to the jury in regard to the fingerprint evidence, on the basis that none of the experts were deliberately trying to deceive the jury or themselves. In addition, there was speculation within the media that the jury had dismissed the SCRO Fingerprint evidence and while I recognised that the fingerprint evidence had been subject of challenge and debate, it was not possible or indeed appropriate to speculate on what the jury had considered in their overall determination in this case.
Additional outcomes from the meeting which were to be circulated by the Crown to Procurator Fiscals, included:

- Advocates would be invited to visit SCRO Fingerprint Bureau.
- Generic fingerprint material would be examined to allow for a more professional presentation in high profile cases.
- Guidance would be given to experts on how to respond to this case at future trials in that experts should ask for time to examine fresh material.
- The Crown would highlight the need to monitor late submissions of material by the defence in order to allow for a more adequate examination.
- Pre-trial indicators should be noted to allow adequate preparation in advance of a trial.

In view of the continued media speculation, and following on the meeting with the Crown, I documented a report to all Chief Constables and the HMIC for Scotland outlining the action that I had taken. I did so in order that they could then consider advising their officers associated with fingerprint evidence of the latest action taken and opinions of the Crown.

I believe that copies of the meeting with the Crown and my letter to all Chief Constables will be available to the Committee. I also responded to other Fingerprint Bureaux, who had asked for additional clarification in this case.

It was my view at this time that I had taken all appropriate action. I then arranged for an internal meeting with all of the fingerprint experts at SCRO. I covered the areas already documented and, in response to a request by one expert to openly examine the fingerprint mark in question, I advised that I was of the view that the mark could well be the subject of debate for some time and that it was my intention not to expose any other expert to this particular case and its challenges. It was my opinion that this approach would then go some way to addressing any attempts to compromise the integrity of other experts at future trials based on the circumstances surrounding the McKie case.

As Director of SCRO, it was my view that it would be inappropriate to make comment and indeed to respond to media speculation and statements being made regarding the McKie case, particularly in light of the related case involving David Asbury who had been convicted of the murder of Marion Ross. There clearly existed the potential for an appeal by Asbury and the possibility of civil litigation. This effectively constrained responses that I could have made at various stages.

Media speculation continued to build, particularly on the daily challenges made by the McKie family, who continued to allege that a misidentification had occurred and the case was then documented on Frontline Scotland (18th January 2000). Following on this and at a meeting that I attended with ACPOS Council (7th February 2000) it was decided that an independent assessment should be made of the fingerprint evidence. As Director, I fully endorsed this approach and Mr William Taylor, as HMCIC, agreed to progress this work and, in that regard, I ensured that SCRO would fully co-operate.
Following on the assessment by HMIC (22 June 2000), I learned that it had been announced that the mark in question was not that of Shirley McKie. It transpired that this was based on an examination of the mark by fingerprint experts from the Netherlands and Norway. I was aware that during all of these developments, and to this date, that the SCRO fingerprint experts involved in the identification of mark Y7 remained committed to their identification as being that of Shirley McKie and that they were of the view that the examination process used by experts in the Netherlands and Norway were different and that this was now an additional area of debate.

It was then agreed that the HMIC would bring forward a planned inspection of SCRO and once again, as Director, I welcomed this inspection and I fully assisted in the overall process. In addition, I worked with a number of teams and groups established by ACPOS to review processes and procedures within the fingerprint service. These, considered the wider implications in the examination and verification process of fingerprints and included the effectiveness and level of resources within the Fingerprint Bureau administrative structure.

These groups included the ACPOS Presidential Review Group (APRG) and the ACPOS Change Management Review Team (CMRT). Mr. James MacKay, then Deputy Chief Constable of Tayside Police, was appointed to conduct a review of the circumstances surrounding crime mark Y7 and, while I assisted that inquiry, I have never seen the report submitted by Mr. MacKay.

During that particular inquiry, which focussed on any criminal implications regarding mark Y7, I had discussions with Mr. Rae, then Chief Constable of Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary and at that time the Chair of the SCRO Executive Committee. This resulted in a documented request to me by ACPOS, based on information provided by Mr. MacKay, on which I ‘Precautionary Suspended’, the four SCRO Fingerprint Experts who had examined mark Y7. Following on this, it was later agreed that in order to avoid further speculation, the Deputy Head of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureaux and the Quality Assurance/Training Officer would not, in the meantime, be involved in any examination or verification processes.

During all of these reviews, inspections and the investigation surrounding the actual criminal inquiry I worked to develop recommendations and suggestions which had been made and I actively contributed to the progress of change as approved by ACPOS.

At all times I worked to the direction and at the pace of ACPOS and the SCRO Executive Committee, on which the Scottish Executive were represented. As previously stated, I was of the view that it was vitally important not to make any public comment which could possibly compromise any appeal or civil litigation process which may be considered in the future. I ensured that all personnel were aware of these particular considerations and in that regard, I had their full co-operation.

As stated in the ACPOS submission, and in order to maintain momentum, a Project Management Team was also established to assist in the progression of matters identified and, once again, I worked in the support of that team.
The final review relating to the circumstances surrounding the Shirley McKie case and the actions of the officers involved the appointment of an ‘Independent Assessor’. This followed on the statement by the Lord Advocate that there would be no criminal proceedings involving the four SCRO Fingerprint experts.

Strathclyde Joint Police Board (SJPB), were the recognised employer and they appointed the assessor and created a disciplinary committee. It was subsequently reported that there were no matters of ‘misconduct or inefficiency’ to be considered and that no discipline action would be taken. I did not have access to the assessor’s report and, following on this, I removed the ‘Precautionary Suspensions’ and the officers were reinstated.

In conjunction with the officers and their staff association, UNISON, I agreed a return to work strategy. This did not involve the officers in any work which could result in the submission of evidence for court purposes as the officers actual status as ‘Expert Witnesses’ would now need to be considered by the Crown. I then developed this aspect through meetings with the Deputy Crown Agent, Mr. Gilchrist. It was then agreed that it would not be appropriate to consider their future position and inclusion on the Crown Office approved ‘List of Expert Witnesses’ until any appeal or civil litigation was fully resolved. I advised the officers and UNISON, of this decision. While they were clearly disappointed, they all agreed to accept the decision at that time.

3. Are you aware of the procedures for identification and subsequent verification of marks which were in place within the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau in 1997 and was it your understanding that they had changed by the time of your arrival

In considering my response to the above, it is important that I again emphasise that at this time I do not have access to any documentation that would allow me to consider a fuller statement on my actual awareness and recollection of the procedures for identification and subsequent verification of marks in 1997 and indeed to make comment when changes and the sequence of any changes were actually introduced.

The obvious challenge is that, in the absence of access to any records which could clarify the process of the many changes that were in fact introduced following on the various reviews, I can only now recall some areas which potentially featured at that particular time. I do however recall the energy and commitment of the Chief Inspector in charge of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau and his management team and their overall willingness to absorb change and to make positive progress, particularly in the development of the findings of the Hamilton Report, as referred to in the ACPOS submission. In that regard and in general terms I recall discussions regarding:

- Need to review the management of ‘Case Envelopes’ to secure the identity and the sequence of ‘First and Second officer’ identification and verification. The system initially showed the names of previous examiners and this was changed to ensure that experts were not aware of previous verifications.
‘Charting Computer/Comparator’ and the quality of court presentations. This was an area challenged during the McKie trial and use of the charting computer was then stopped. In addition, the process of marking up the comparator to highlight experts’ points of identification was changed to clear previous markings before verification by an expert in the same case.

‘Allocation of Cases’ notified for trial was directed to those experts who had made the initial identification and not re-allocated to other experts on receipt.

Development of the ‘Competency/Proficiency Testing’ procedure for experts. This had been an internal SCRO process which was subsequently considered by the FBI to be too stringent. The Fingerprint Bureau subsequently committed to an independent external testing process.

The Bureau had tried a serious of ‘Blind Trials’ which involved the introduction of a test case for examination and subsequent evaluation. It was then concluded, that this was not appropriate process for the service.

Enhancement of the ‘Quality Assurance Process’ with the intention of introducing ‘ISO Accreditation’.

In order to support early change within the Bureau, I recall that the following were also among many others areas considered:

- Requirement for a case tracking and management system
- Need to examine the clerical support, supplemented with temporary staff
- Abstraction of experts involved in administrative roles
- Commitment of experts to the demands of the Automatic Fingerprint Recognition (AFR) system
- Need to recruit and train Ten-print Identification Officers
- Separation of the roles of Quality Assurance and Training officer
- Introduction of a Non Numeric Fingerprint Standard
- Development of an independent Corporate Identity for SCRO
- Common standards and procedures within the fingerprint environment
- Revised service level agreements with all Scottish Police Forces
4. **HMIC’s 2000 Primary Inspection Report recommended radical reorganisation of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau. At the time, did you agree that such action was required?** HMIC’s 2000 report makes 55 recommendations and 25 Suggestions. What was your involvement in acting on these recommendations and suggestions? Was it your belief that all of the recommendations and suggestions had been implemented?

It is my understanding that the HMIC’s 2000 Primary Inspection 2000 Report, listed ‘25 Recommendations and 20 Suggestions’ and the reference to ‘55 Recommendations and 25 Suggestions’ are as a result of all of the HMIC Inspections carried out between 2000 and 2004.

The outcome of the Primary Inspection of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau by the HMIC, Mr Taylor, is detailed within his Primary Inspection Report 2000. As stated, that report actually contained 25 recommendations and made 20 suggestions. The HMIC report was directly informed by the previous work of Mr John Hamilton, then Chief Constable of Fife Constabulary, who chaired a ‘Scottish Fingerprint Service Working Group’ and commissioned a ‘Private Consultant’ to review the work of the fingerprint service in Scotland. While these areas of work were ongoing when I became Director, I found their observations of great benefit in assessing the direction of the service. I agreed with their findings and I actively worked with staff to drive forward and implement these. In that regard, I chaired an ‘Eight Force Standard Group’. This involved the Heads of all of the other Force Fingerprint Bureaux coming together to examine common practices and procedures and service level agreements with Forces. There were, however, only two meetings of this group before it was suspended following on the initial findings of the HMIC and the establishment of the ACPOS reviews.

As Director of SCRO, I made a documented ‘SCRO Response’ to a ‘draft copy’ of the HMIC’s Primary Inspection Report 2000. I have now requested that SCRO make available to me a copy of that report, to date this has not been provided. It is, however, my understanding that a copy is in fact available to the Justice 1 Committee. In the absence of that report, I will be unable to document a detailed response, however, I will attempt to explain my position as I recall it at that time and I would, therefore, refer the Committee to the documented ‘SCRO Response’ which will provide the detail required.

I would state that my recollection is that the HMIC’s report of 2000, in the main, did refer to the findings of previous reviews and activity and translated these to recommendations and suggestions. Indeed, that was the focus of my response to the HMIC and I recall that his reply fully recognised my response as both constructive and comprehensive. It was acknowledged by Mr Taylor that ‘many of the issues raised were already identified and steps were being taken’ and that ‘credit has been given and will continue to be given for what SCRO staff were progressing’.

In was my view, that by documenting these issues as recommendations and suggestions, the HMIC was in fact elevating them to a more formal status, thereby ensuring that they would be readily accepted and endorsed by ACPOS and the Scottish Executive.
The HMIC was clear that some of the findings were out with the control of SCRO management. It is important that I emphasise, that ACPOS and the Scottish Executive, were active and indeed very supportive of the progress being made.

While I understood the concerns of the HMIC, I viewed his statement that the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau was ‘inefficient and ineffective’, as a direct reference to the overall circumstances relating to the Bureau backlog of cases to be progressed.

This was a particularly significant issue as, at the time of my appointment in November 1998, the backlog of cases was in excess of 7,000 and that within a year, with some reorganisation, the assistance of other Bureaux and additional financial support, the backlog was dramatically reduced to a level which the Bureau could sustain on the basis of ‘Work in Progress’.

In addition, in my opinion, the debate regarding the Bureau overall credibility to make fingerprint identifications, while seriously challenged through the McKie case, was built on the perception of others and that the Bureau overall integrity had in fact been fully endorsed through the requirements of the Lord Advocate. That direction required that independent verifications be carried out of all SCRO identifications and this condition was in place for at least one year and subsequently involved thousands of cases and even more actual marks and impressions.

In addition, I personally caused a re-examination of all identifications made by the officers involved in the identification of mark Y7 for a one year period either side of the actual date of that identification. All of these independent examinations subsequently returned a 100% confirmation on all of the identifications made by these officers and of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau.

I therefore welcomed the HMIC’s report as it directly reflected the work and action that I was progressing in line with the Hamilton Report, as previously referred to and subject of more detailed comment within the ACPOS submission. I then had the direct benefit of the support of the Scottish Executive, ACPOS, the ACPOS Presidential Review Group (APRG) and the Change Management Review Team (CMRT) and latterly an ACPOS Project Team.

My involvement in the progression of the recommendations was to work closely with the APRG and the CMRT to address the changes required by the recommendations and, as such, I reported direct to the President of ACPOS and to the SCRO Executive Committee. As indicated, in my view, the HMIC findings had in the main been born out of the work of previous groups and, as these were the areas being progressed, then the actual momentum to drive change was in fact in place and would be further complemented by the status of the HMIC report.

While progress was openly supported by ACPOS and the Executive, it is important that I also recognise the support that was given to me by Strathclyde Joint Police Board, (SJPB). The Board were technically the employers of the SCRO civilian staff and their agreement to facilitate and to streamline the organisation’s recruitment processes, and indeed my own direct access to the Board, was of immediate and direct benefit.
This allowed me to advance the change process now in place and I recall that some of the early activity then focussed on areas surrounding:

- Re-grading of fingerprint experts salaries in line with other Bureaux
- Recruitment of temporary clerical staff
- Recruitment of ten-print identification officers to progress AFR work
- Introduction of a quality control system for marks received at the Bureau
- Short-term secondment of fingerprint experts from other Force Bureau
- A recruitment strategy to target fingerprint experts out with Scotland
- Evaluation of a case management system
- Identification and relocation of SCRO to new premises
- Provision of custom designed workstations for fingerprint experts
- Development of the organisation’s independent corporate identity
- Staff involvement with the Council for Registering Forensic Practitioners
- National Training at Durham and focussed training on court presentations
- Development of ISO accreditation by the Quality Assurance Officer

One of the main issues was the creation of a Scottish Fingerprint Service (SFS). This required recruitment of a Head of Service. It was anticipated that this would not be a police post and that the appointment would require an individual with strength of character to manage and influence the necessary change and work towards the development of the concept of a fully integrated Scottish Fingerprint Service.

The selected officer would ensure that the documented recommendations would be fully applied. It was recognised that this would also require a committed and open individual who could build on relationship, develop loyalty and the commitment of staff across the service.

Prior to my retirement as Director, I was involved in early meetings regarding the review of the Common Police Service structure and considerations in regard to a new Forensic Science Service which would embrace a Scottish Fingerprint Service. I am aware that these areas are now being evaluated by Deputy Chief Constable David Mulhern as he contributes to the development of a Scottish Police Service Authority.
It was my understanding that all of the recommendations were implemented over a period, while those potentially out with direct SCRO management control could indeed take some additional time to address. Notwithstanding that, I am satisfied that the recommendations were all actively progressed during the period that I was Director of SCRO.

I now note the reference in the ACPOS submission that all of the recommendations and suggestions emanating from the HMCIC Inspections of SCRO have been discharged and that in the HMIC 2004 Inspection of SCRO there was an acknowledgement and recognition of the strong leadership demonstrated within SCRO and, in that regard, I welcomed the statement and the direct support provided to me by all personnel at SCRO, the Scottish Executive, ACPOS and the various chairs of the SCRO Executive Committee.

5. during the period in which your were head of the SCRO, what pressures were there on the Fingerprint Bureau in particular in terms of resources and the demand on the service? Was it a positive working environment? Did you perceive that the working environment had changed after 1997? In what ways did you seek to foster this change?

The ACPOS submission outlines the historical position in regard to the fingerprint service in Scotland and the existence of Fingerprint Bureaux within five Scottish Forces. The establishment of SCRO in 1960 is documented and the relocation of the organisation to Strathclyde Police Headquarters, Pitt Street, Glasgow in 1975, following on the amalgamation of Scottish Forces, is recorded. There is an accurate description of the direct service provision to Strathclyde Police, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, Northern Constabulary and that provided to the Scottish Police Service and wider justice community in Scotland.

As stated, the organisation also maintained the Criminal History System for Scotland and provided interfaces to the Police National Computer, however, as indicated, the role of the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau was expanded in 1991, and again in 1997, with the introduction of the Automatic Fingerprint Recognition (AFR) and Livescan systems. This provided for the capture of fingerprints from persons in custody at police offices and the electronic transmission of these to the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau where they were compared against the National ‘Ten-print Fingerprint Collection’ and searched against the outstanding ‘Crime Mark database’.

The Livescan service was available on a 24/7 basis with a 2 hour service level agreement on confirmation of identity. I was aware that the previous Director had concerns on the Bureau ability to maintain a quality of service due to the volume of work now being generated and an inability to recruit trained fingerprint experts.

I note that the ACPOS submission outlines the number of experts, their role, and the training period and makes reference to the loss of experienced experts. In that regard, I again welcome their submission as it reflects some of the relevant detail which I
would, at this time find difficult in accurately recalling. I do, however, acknowledge that these factors, which were further complicated through the increased workload, collectively contributed to low moral and a rapidly growing backlog of outstanding cases. The work committed fingerprint experts to the verification of ten-print comparisons, while the experts were well aware that crime scene work was not being fully addressed as there were not enough fingerprint experts within the Bureau. In addition, it was apparent that there were different salary scales within the fingerprint environment in Scotland and the SCRO experts recognised that they were not appropriately graded.

Abstractions of experts from core duties were further exacerbated by attendance at court where, invariably, they were not called to provide evidence. This was an area where the Crown made ever effort to resolve, with officers put on a stand-by basis. Experts were also involved in administrative processes, filing and retrieving cases, as the clerical support was not adequate and this again affected their ability to service the backlog.

In addition, the new electronic systems and the terminals were installed within the existing accommodation and impacted on the overall working environment. This all collectively led to a higher than average ‘sickness rate’ among staff.

While there is no doubt that during that period the overall moral was low and indeed dropping, staff were proud of their ability to continue to make identifications and they personally recognised the contribution they were making to the justice system.

That said, the intense media speculation and challenges to their integrity had a dramatic effect on performance and moral. However, despite the media attention and statements made following on the McKie case and the ‘Precautionary Suspensions’ of their colleagues, which was followed by working restrictions on the Deputy Head of the Bureau and the Quality Assurance Training Officer, all officers who were held in high regard, staff were encouraged to sees the benefits of close scrutiny including reviews.

It was my personal view that they also recognised my position as Director and the direct responsibility that I had to continue to ensure service delivery during this challenging period.

I was assisting in the various reviews, contributing to the implementation of the numerous recommendations, ensuring that the service provision was maintained and indeed improved. In that regard, one aspect that I found was in fact of particular significance was the direction of the Lord Advocate. This followed on the publication of the HMIC Primary Inspection 2000 Report when, as previously stated, a condition was put in place that all identifications emanating from the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau would require to be verified by independent experts. I pointed out to staff that this was indeed a high level of ‘quality assurance’ and one that very few organisations had been exposed to and with an eventual outcome which provided 100% confirmation of thousands of cases and indeed many more thousands of marks and impressions, then overall the quality of the work of the Bureau could then be seen as being of the highest calibre and a reassurance for the public and the wider criminal justice community.
It was apparent that morale in general improved through the re-location of SCRO to new premises at Pacific Quay in Glasgow. There was car parking and modern canteen facilities and an exercise room was installed. As was the case with other departments and bureaux within SCRO, the Fingerprint Bureau was provided with brand new office accommodation with purpose designed workstations. There was separation of the Livescan service to another part of the Bureau. There were break-out areas with refreshment facilities and the building was fully air conditioned with a high level of natural lighting. All of this was designed to improve the overall working environment and morale in general across SCRO.

In addition, temporary clerical staff had been recruited to address the filing processes and remove the administrate functions from the experts. As recommended, there was also a separation of the role of the Quality Assurance/Training Officer and management were provided with separate but adjoining offices on the same floor within the Bureau. An office management system was eventually introduced and there were plans to reduce the number of police posts within the Bureau.

In my opinion, one of the most important change processes involved the introduction of ‘Ten-Print Identification Officers (TIO’s). They were trained to a level which allowed them in the short term to confirm identifications on the Livescan system and, while a fingerprint expert was always on hand, to assist in confirmations of Livescan ten-prints. The fingerprint experts were, in the main, then able to concentrate on the backlog of cases. This allowed the experts to then directly apply their skills to the examination of more crime cases, an area of work that they clearly found more satisfying.

This approach, together with the assistance of the other Force Fingerprint Bureaux, eventually reduced the backlog of cases and this, in particular, had a very positive effect on staff morale, as did the regarding of salaries which sat alongside an active programme to recruit experts from out with Scotland. These overall measures eventually had some effect on the Bureaux sickness record.

It is appropriate to point out that peaks in the ongoing media speculation and the regular statements which were being made, coupled with the volume of ‘Parliamentary Questions’, did have an obvious direct affect on staff morale, however, in between media statements, the staff eventually did seem to recover. In regard to the officers directly involved in the McKie case, they personally looked towards the development of the civil litigation process as an opportunity and a platform on which, at some time in the future, they could make their opinions known publicly and to be further supported by the two defence experts not called at the McKie trial.

Overall, my direct contribution was also to ensure that all staff remained informed of developments as appropriate and, initially, I did that through organised meetings. However, on the appointment of the Head of the Fingerprint Service, it was my policy to fully brief that officer and I would then expect him to then update staff and to be seen to manage all personnel across the Scottish Fingerprint Service.
In working to improve staff morale, sustain performance and apply the recommendations and suggestions made while driving change within the concept of the new Scottish Fingerprint Service, I acknowledge the assistance of the officers who held the post of Deputy Director at SCRO. All worked diligently to progress matters and fully supported me during a challenging and demanding period.

It is my view, that prior to concluding my period as Director of SCRO, in April 2005, the whole organisation had developed and was indeed central to the operation of the wider criminal justice system in Scotland, providing interfaces with England and Wales through the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) and the Police National Computer (PNC). In addition, the number of stakeholders had increased through the Integration of the Scottish Criminal Justice Information System (ISCJIS), which, through access to the SCRO Criminal History System, provided for the electronic transfer and access to information by partners within the justice community.

In addition, and with the support of my senior management, other Bureaux within SCRO had been reorganised to streamline their service provision. ACPOS and the Scottish Executive had agreed to the introduction of new services, such as the ‘Crimestoppers’ programme, which was re-located and centrally managed from SCRO on a 24/7 basis. This was in addition to the oversight management and development of the service being provided by the Disclosure Scotland Bureau, also located at SCRO.

In my view the relocation of SCRO to new premises and the direct and focussed support and progression of the various recommendations made in respect of future service provision, then placed the SCRO Fingerprint Bureau within the structure of the concept of a Scottish Fingerprint Service - a new service that embraced Bureaux at Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh, all centrally managed from SCRO. In addition, ACPOS and the Scottish Executive were committed to the Home Office ‘IDENT1’ Fingerprint Programme, which would, in particular, allow electronic searches of crime scene marks across the whole of the UK. This development would also assist in further integrating the Fingerprint Service in Scotland.

I have referred to the internal re-organisation of other bureaux in SCRO. In my opinion, while this allowed the organisation to streamline its overall service provision, it also further developed staff morale as this brought staff together and they were willing to work within other bureaux to address peaks in administrative functions. This was further complemented by the quality of service that was eventually sustained by Disclosure Scotland and, in that regard, all personnel, including the staff of the Fingerprint Bureau, recognised the pivotal role of the organisation within the criminal justice service in Scotland, while being fully aware of the consideration being given in regard to integration of the Scottish Fingerprint Service within a new Scottish Forensic Science Service, and that this would further develop the service.

I recognise that during my time as Director of SCRO, and in light of the early circumstances involving the McKie case, I saw the benefits of the HMIC Inspections and the various ACPOS reviews. All of these activities provided me, as the Director, with a clear strategic path and a level of support on which I could then develop SCRO.
I am satisfied, that during my term of office, the organisation addressed its challenges and developed on a platform based on well considered recommendations and suggestions and that all of this was readily supported through the direct financial commitment of the Scottish Executive and the endorsement of ACPOS.

While SCRO as an organisation will be embraced within a new Common Police Services structure in Scotland and there will be a re-alignment of the overall service provision, I have no doubt that all of the personnel will continue to maintain their high standards and professional approach.

Harry Bell QPM
Director SCRO - November 1998 to April 2005