

Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

DNA and fingerprint samples

Letter from the Scottish Government to the Convener

I wanted to write to you before the Parliamentary recess gets underway properly to bring you up to date with the situation at Police Scotland regarding the use of police staff to take DNA and fingerprint samples.

As you know, this issue came to light as a result of a review of custody services by the Police Service. This found that custody assistants, rather than constables or designated Police Custody and Security Officers (PCSOs), had taken prints and samples in the former Tayside and Dumfries & Galloway force areas. It was quickly established that the practice was restricted to these areas and to a relatively small number of staff, and the use of police staff for this task was stopped at that stage.

Police Scotland established a Gold Group, led by a Chief Superintendent, to take the investigation forward, and this Group includes the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. Staff of both organisations are working to identify the DNA samples taken by custody assistants and any potential impacts which arise from this. It is a complex issue and the police do not know how long it will take to determine the implications for the police and individual criminal cases, both live and historical.

The examination has been prioritised by Police Scotland, and the Gold Group continues to meet on a regular basis. My officials are in close contact with the police and will keep me informed of progress throughout the recess. I understand at this stage, however, that the examination has not uncovered any areas of significant concern.

I hope this is helpful and will, of course, continue to keep Parliament informed as matters become clearer.

Kenny MacAskill
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
27 June 2013