

FOI 2022-318

I write in connection with your request for information dated 5 April 2022 concerning hunts.

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to handle all requests in a manner that is blind as to the identity and motives of the requestor. Any information released as a response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore in the public domain without caveat.

You wrote:

1) In the survey you conducted amongst Wiltshire residents earlier this year, how many responses showed concern about anti-hunt groups and their behaviour?

You have stated that only .58% expressed concern about illegal hunting. You have not, in any of our previous communications, or in any communications with other Wiltshire residents that I know of, stated the number of residents that expressed concern about anti-hunting groups. You have stated that you will spend money on issues concerning residents. I am going to assume that either there were very few - or none at all.

2) Given that you used the figure of .58% to discount concerns about illegal hunting, why have you not ALSO discounted concerns about anti-hunting groups on the same basis?

3) You state that you have monitored anti-hunting groups covertly. Why did you do this covertly? When did you do this? Which anti hunting groups did you monitor? Where did this happen? What evidence do you have that this happened at all?

4) You claim that you saw "balaclava wearing thugs". What motivated you to use the emotive, judgemental word "thug"?

Response:

Questions One to Four

No Information Held.

Under our Section 16 obligation to provide advice and assistance, please see the press release from the Police and Crime Commissioner which relates to your request:

Statement from Philip Wilkinson, Police and Crime Commissioner.

The subject of hunting is divisive and people on both sides of the argument defend their position with passion, I understand this and respect each viewpoint.

Much has been made of my use of language in the context of attending a hunt. I have attended hunt meetings in my personal capacity, as a resident, a few times to witness, first-hand, what happens. I used to make it clear that I was not attending in an official capacity and was not recognised as such when doing so. The use of word 'covert' in this instance was loose terminology. I should have made that clearer.

Strong campaigning by each side of the argument means that often my true aim is overlooked. I would like to make it clear: Wiltshire's countryside is open for all to enjoy lawfully and legitimately – and my role as PCC is to ensure this happens.

As I have made clear on many occasions my job is to ensure Wiltshire Police enforces the law impartially, without fear or favour, against whomsoever should break it, from whatever background or whichever side of the hunting argument they sit – and I continue to work with the Chief Constable on this.

I will not allow undue influence or pressure from any private or protest group to affect the operational independence of Wiltshire Police.