

FOI 2022-314

I write in connection with your request for information dated 5th April 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:

I am writing to lodge a freedom of information request relating to claims made online by Wiltshire PCC Philip Wilkinson.

He claims to have engaged in covert trips to witness hunt saboteurs on two occasions. These must have been logged, recorded and detailed any illegal or abusive/violent conduct by the hunt or the hunt saboteurs. I would like to know exactly what he saw and when and ask for evidence to back up his online claims with particular reference to “black clad, balaclava wearing thugs shouting and screaming abuse in the face of children simply because they were riding ponies”

If there was such a reported incident(s) I would like to know the crime reference and the exact details of any allegations made?

Response:

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.

