

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 understand that in recorded information Philip Wilkinson says that he has “been to two hunts covertly” where he witnessed “thugs shouting abuse in the face [sic] of children”. I am surprised that Wilkinson was authorised to carry out covert operations and you may wish to comment on that. In any event, please provide the following information:

- 1) What were the dates of Wilkinson’s covert actions to which he refers;
- 2) What were the locations referred to in 1.;
- 3) What were the hunts involved referred to in 1.;
- 4) I understand that “shouting abuse in the face of children” is a public order offence. Wilkinson will therefore have reported the offence(s). Please provide the crime reference numbers and all other information that you hold that you are permitted to release relating to this/ these offences;
- 5) Were other officers present at the covert actions referred to in 1. and if so, who were they.

Response:

Questions One to Five

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.