

FOI 2022-321

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 incredibly concerned by institutional bias in Wiltshire police and by Mr Wilkinson when it comes to enforcing the hunting act, particularly in light of the Hankinson verdict which confirmed Wooler's inquiry findings that lies and illegality are rife within 'trail hunting'- an activity discredited as a 'smokescreen' for crime, according to the Hankinson verdict.

I believe Mr Wilkinson has made claims that he has covertly attended hunts and seen people 'shouting and screaming abuse in the face of children simply because they were riding ponies'.

Such outrageous statements require similarly extraordinary proof. Please

confirm:

Which hunts Mr Wilkinson has attended.

What efforts he has made to report this 'abuse'.

What the crime reference number is for these reports.

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.