

Report of the Cabinet Member Organisational Development & Digital Transformation

I have been asked by Councillor Aves to report on the County Council's continued support for Fairtrade so that the alternatives such as Fairly Traded will not weaken the good work being done by Fairtrade.

Introduction

Firstly, I would like to thank Cllr Aves for her question and for the opportunity to discuss Fairtrade in this Chamber. I know that many of you, like me, are supporters of Fairtrade.

Background

Devon was first awarded Fairtrade County status by the Fairtrade Foundation in 2008 and we have been successful in renewing our status ever since. I am delighted that our Fairtrade work has always received cross party support on this Council.

Devon County Council works with Fairtrade Devon to promote the benefits of Fairtrade and encourage individuals, communities, organisations and companies to act in support of Fairtrade.

The Council's Work

In our work we:

- Look for innovative opportunities to promote the principles and values of Fairtrade;
- Deepen people's understanding of what Fairtrade does and why it is so important, we do this by helping to bring Fairtrade producers to Devon to tell their story;
- Support a countywide movement of Fairtrade towns and volunteers who engage actively in campaigns and lobbying;
- Use and procure Fairtrade products.

Fair Trade Alternatives

The UK is one of the world's leading Fairtrade markets, with more products and more awareness of Fairtrade than anywhere else. However, some companies make their own 'fair trade' claims without having the independent scrutiny of the Fairtrade mark, which shows that the product meets international Fairtrade standards.

The Fairtrade Premium is what makes Fairtrade unique. It is an additional sum of money paid on top of the Fairtrade minimum price that farmers and workers invest in social, environmental and economic development projects to improve their businesses and communities. They decide democratically by committee how to invest the premium and it is typically spent on health and education projects.

Some Members will be aware of the recent decision of Sainsbury's to drop the Fairtrade mark and introduce their own 'fairly traded' label. Under their new scheme, Sainsbury's will withhold the Fairtrade Premium and their 'expert committee' in London will decide what will be funded rather than the decisions being made at grass roots level by Fairtrade Co-operatives.

Fairtrade Devon has joined the national campaign to ask Sainsbury's to rethink its plan and reinstate the Fairtrade Premium, this has included lobbying MPs and engaging directly with Sainsbury's policy makers as well as local store managers. Fairtrade Devon is also in direct contact with Fairtrade producers themselves to monitor the situation and impact. An online petition calling for Sainsbury's not to ditch Fairtrade is close to 100,000 signatures as at 3 October.

Summary and Conclusion

I would like reassure Councillor Aves that Devon County Council:

- will continue to support the work of Fairtrade Devon;
- remains committed to Fairtrade County status; and
- will continue to purchase products that carry the Fairtrade mark.

Councillor Barry Parsons
Cabinet Member
Organisational Development & Digital Transformation