

# Outrage as Tesco backs gay festival... but drops support for cancer charity event

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Tesco has triggered outrage by ending its support for the Cancer Research 'Race for Life' while deciding to sponsor Britain's largest gay festival.

Some religious commentators and groups have condemned the decision and are calling for a boycott of the supermarket chain.

Tesco has worked with Cancer Research for more than ten years, raising hundreds of millions of pounds to help combat an illness that will affect one in three of the population.

The chain's main contribution was support for the annual fundraising Race for Life, the UK's largest women-only charity event, which has raised more than £400million for the fight against cancer since it began in 1994.

But shortly after Tesco announced the partnership would end, the firm said it would be a headline sponsor of Pride London.

This is Britain's largest gay pride event, and will be adding a second day next year when it hosts the global WorldPride 2012 festival in July.

Tesco's chief executive of retailing services, Andrew Higginson, said: 'Our "Out at Tesco" team will be working closely with Pride London to ensure next year's event is even more fun.'

Francis Phillips, a commentator at The Catholic Herald, condemned the shift, saying: 'Tesco is a supermarket.

Its remit has been to sell good-quality food and other items at very reasonable prices, and in this it has been hugely successful.

Why has it now aligned itself with an aggressive political organisation such as Pride London?

‘Why has it given up its sponsorship of Cancer Research? Or at least...why hasn’t it taken up with another mainstream charity such as the British Legion or Age UK?’

‘There are thousands of ex-servicemen and wounded soldiers needing help in this country, and millions of elderly people in danger of neglect.

‘They are a fundamental part of the fabric of our society – the kind of fabric that Tesco should be reflecting.’

David Skinner of the Anglican Mainstream organisation, which supports traditional marriage and family life, has written to complain to Mr Higginson and Tesco chief executive Philip Clarke.

He wrote: ‘For Tesco to sponsor a tiny homosexual minority – according to the Office for National Statistics, that amounts to little more than 1 per cent of the population – will be showing the utmost contempt for a large proportion of British society that still adheres, more or less, to the morality and values of the Ten Commandments.’

Both Mrs Phillips and Mr Skinner are calling on consumers to boycott Tesco.

‘Let’s send Tesco a message: stick to groceries and stop dabbling in dubious fringe political movements,’ said Mrs Phillips.

Catholic campaign website Protect the Pope said Tesco’s decision was ‘a sign of how out of touch they have become from ordinary families’.

Cancer Research UK, which gave no sign of disappointment about losing Tesco’s support, is looking for a new partner for the Race for Life.

Emma Gilbert, who organises the event, said the partnership ‘came to a natural end’ for both parties.

But she added: ‘Tesco employees have taken part in events across the UK, raising over £7million for our life-saving research, and we hope they will continue to take part in the events.’

Tesco said it was in talks with the charity to support its work in other ways and would encourage staff to continue taking part in the Race for Life.

A spokesman said the decision to drop its support ‘is not connected to our £30,000 sponsorship for Pride, which is one of hundreds of community and charitable events that we will be supporting next year’.

Pride London chairman Paul Birrell said: ‘Whilst Pride is organised entirely by volunteers, it costs in excess of £800,000 to run each year.

‘We are proud that Pride London remains a free event, but this is only possible because of companies like Tesco and their generous support.’

He added that Tesco’s contribution would be used to run an entertainment area for families and children at next year’s festival.