

SME Advisory Group

Tuesday 14th February 2017

Room 3, D/PER, Government Buildings, Merrion Street, Dublin 2

Minutes

Attendees:

Minister of State Eoghan Murphy, Chair

Jim Deane, OGP

Karl Ryan, OGP

Jackie Byrne, OGP

Joan Grogan, OGP

Eoghan Richardson, DJEI

Catherine Curran, DJEI

Aidan Sweeney, IBEC

Patricia Callen, SFA

Ian Talbot, Chambers Ireland

Enda McDonnell, Enterprise Ireland

Neil McDonnell, ISME

Martin Lang, CIF

Apologies:

Sean Downey, CIF

John Shine, CCPC

Harry O'Rahilly, CCPC

1. Introduction

Minister of State Murphy welcomed the representatives and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to continue supporting and enhancing SME access to public procurement opportunities.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 26th October 2016 were agreed and will be published on the OGP website.

3. External TAS Review

As discussed at previous meetings, the internal review of TAS had been concluded by the OGP and the service will be continued for another year. The Programme for Government provides for an external review of TAS. A draft terms of reference for the external review was circulated and the OGP requested any observations/feedback be provided to OGP within a week.

4. Private Members Bill on Social Clauses

The Public Services and Procurement (Social Values) Bill 2017, introduced by Deputy Frank O'Rourke, FF spokesperson on procurement, was discussed. The general consensus of the Representative Bodies was that the proposed blanket approach of the Bill would be ineffective and could disproportionately impact on and impose costs on SMEs and favour larger suppliers.

The OGP advised that they had met with Deputy O'Rourke and his Advisor on 7 February to discuss the Bill.

The OGP expressed some concerns regarding the Bill as drafted. The OGP noted the SME Representative Bodies comments about the potential impact on the SME Sector.

Minister Murphy indicated that the Bill is at second stage with a possible listing for discussion in the Dáil on 21st or 28th February. The Minister also advised that the progress of the Bill through the various stages can take time. Therefore, there will be an opportunity to work co-operatively on creating a better Bill for all concerned.

5. Communications Subgroup Update

The first meeting of the SME Subgroup on Communication strategy took place on 19th January at the OGP offices. The overall aim is to increase suppliers' awareness, understanding and tendering skills in public tendering and to target and tailor the messaging to have a greater overall impact. The OGP advised that the draft outline of the communication strategy will be circulated shortly and a workshop with public sector practitioners will be arranged.

Other general concerns raised related to below EU threshold tendering processes and the future impact of Brexit. The OGP advised that revised general public procurement guidelines are being prepared which will cover below as well as above threshold tendering. The EU Commission estimates

that below threshold tendering accounts for approximately 80% of the public procurement market. Enterprise Ireland stated they are working with companies to prepare them for upcoming procurement opportunities. IBEC commended OGP on the improvements to the tendering documents which have been streamlined. These improvements have been very good in keeping micro contractors on board; however they are still perceived as a barrier to smaller businesses.

6. Public Procurement Briefing – Cork

Minister Murphy gave feedback on the briefing event which took place in Cork on 3rd February. It was well attended and there was positive feedback from the attendees. The objective of the briefing was to explain the rationale behind the procurement reform programme and to hear at first hand from local businesses their experiences and concerns. This will help inform and refine the procurement reform model.

Another Public Procurement Briefing is scheduled to take place on Friday 24th February 2017 in Galway. There were some concerns amongst the group that this did not allow adequate notice for potential attendees. IBEC and Chambers Ireland advised that they will shortly be holding an event in Galway as well and would provide details. The consensus was that industry targeted and regional events are beneficial and Minister Murphy suggested continuing to facilitate targeted local Briefing events.

There were concerns amongst the group regarding competing events. The suggestion was raised again about all parties involved in the working group having co-ordinated calendars so future events could be communicated to a larger audience. This would be considered in the context of the Communication Strategy.

A.O.B.

Enterprise Ireland updated the group on the Small Business Innovation Research project, twenty nine expressions of interest from public bodies have been received. There is sanction to assist seven projects on a 50/50 basis. The aim is to promote non off-the- shelf products.

The OGP confirmed that the new OGP website is due to launch in March and the minutes of this group will be published on this site.