

SME Advisory Group

Thursday 14th June 2018

South Block, Government Buildings, Merrion Street, Dublin 2

Minutes

Attendees:

Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan - Chair		Jim Deane - OGP	
Derek Flanagan - OGP	Grant Gilmore - ITI	Linda Barry - SFA	
Neil McDonnell - ISME	Sarah Freeman - Chambers		Marguerite Bourke - EI
Tonia Spollen Behrens - EI	Neil Kerrigan - EI		Sean Downey - CIF
Aidan Sweeney - IBEC	Joan Grogan - OGP		Jason Coyle - OGP

Apologies:

Paul Quinn – OGP	Margaret Hearty - InterTrade Ireland
John Shine – CCPC	

1. Minutes of previous meeting and Actions Arising

Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan welcomed the representatives. The minutes of the last meeting were taken as read and will be published on the OGP website.

Under Actions Arising, the Minister advised that it was decided, after consultation with this group, not to increase the threshold for advertising on eTenders at this moment in time, primarily to support and promote openness and transparency in public procurement. This will be reviewed at a later date with further input from the OGP and the SME Advisory Group.

2. Programme for Government Review

The external review of the Tendering Advisory Service was covered under Item 3.

The OGP advised they were in the process of producing a paper on the merits of establishing a Procurement Ombudsman which will initiate the consultation process. This is a complex matter and needs to be looked at proportionately and pragmatically to get the balance right. There is a lot of discussion regarding this topic at EU level and OGP will be looking at review bodies in other jurisdictions and considering the Irish context to form the background of the paper. The European

Commission's initial evaluation of the Remedies regime deem them as working well so they do not intend to change the Directives or the Regulations. Further issues relating to the consultation were discussed by members of the group.

3. Relaunch of the Tender Advisory Service (TAS)

The OGP expect to relaunch the service by the end of June and requested the SME Representatives help promote the use of the service. The Group discussed different methods of promoting the service. The OGP advised they were currently looking at logo designs for the TAS relaunch, which they will circulate to the Group. The Minister suggested an annual summary is published on the OGP website detailing engagement rates of the service.

4. Advertising Threshold for eTenders

This was covered under Item 1 in Actions Arising.

5. Social Considerations Information Note

The OGP updated the group on the Social Considerations Information Note which is currently at drafting stage. The OGP stated that procurement spend can be a medium for inclusion of social considerations where they are suited to the contract, however, this is a complex area and one size doesn't fit all. There needs to be a joined up cross functional Government approach involving relevant Departments.

6. Communication Strategy Update

The OGP confirmed that two more informative videos were due to be published shortly along with another case study and a video on the 'Do's and Don'ts' of tendering is being considered. ITI confirmed the animations and videos were well received and they had received good feedback at the recent Meet the Buyer event.

The OGP also updated the Group on the progress of the Breakfast Briefings and confirmed the turnout at the Dublin event was very good. The second event in Waterford, although high numbers registered, attendance was affected by the extreme weather conditions, but there was still a relatively good turnout. The Group discussed targeting locations for future events and how to improve the promotion of these events.

7. A.O.B.

SME Representatives raised the matter of Purchase Order data not being available in some sectors, and how poor visibility of spend data can impede on SMEs determining if they should tender for contracts in their respective area. The Minister asked the OGP to consider this matter and to give an update at the next meeting.

The OGP advised the Group on recent legal cases and advised that the OGP are currently analysing the ramifications for the State.

The public consultation on eInvoicing closed at the end of May and there was a good response from the SME sector. The next two stages are to transpose the eInvoicing Directive into national legislation and to draft a national framework agreement for the procurement of eInvoicing. The Directive will come into force on 18th April 2019.

EI updated the Group on Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR). Since 2014 they have had twenty one challenges to date. There were twelve this year, ten of which have been finalised. They now have their first cross border challenge which is between Belfast and Dublin. They will be launching further challenges and advised that SBIR is a great opportunity for SMEs and provides societal benefits to the citizen.

CIF brought up issues relating to risk transfer. The Minister advised that this had been raised in the Dáil and he suggested a meeting should be arranged separately with officials and the OGP.

The Minister advised the Group members that this was their forum so they should bring forward any items they would like discussed at the meetings to be put on the Agenda.