

SME Advisory Group

Wednesday 12th June 2019

South Block, Government Buildings, Merrion Street, Dublin 2

Minutes

Attendees:

Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan - Chair		Jim Deane – OGP
Sean Downey - CIF	Aidan Sweeney - IBEC	Shane Conneely – Chambers Ireland
Eoghan Richardson - DBEI	Neil McDonnell – ISME	Gerard Fenner – EI
Colm Ó'Gormáin - CCPC	Elizabeth Bowen – SFA	Nora Bermingham - OGP
Joan Grogan - OGP		

Apologies:

Paul Quinn - OGP	Margaret Hearty - ITI
Grant Gilmore - ITI	Áine Carroll - CCPC
Caroline Sweeney – ITI	Declan Hughes - DBEI
Christine Murray – DBEI	Sarah Smithers - DBEI
Ian Talbot – Chambers	Emma Kerrins - Chambers
Tonia Spollen Behrens – EI	Derek Flanagan - OGP

1. Minutes of previous meeting and Actions Arising

The Minister of State welcomed the Group and the minutes of the last meeting were taken as read and will be published on the OGP website. There were no matters arising.

2. Programme for Government Review

The OGP updated the Group on progress in relation to the consultation on the merits of establishing a Procurement Ombudsman, and informed them that two OGP officials were visiting CoPE (Commission of Procurement Experts), the review model in place in the Netherlands the following day i.e. 13 June. This visit will help inform wider public and political consultation on how best to provide an effective and accessible review mechanism for public procurement.

3. Minister of State's Proposals

The OGP advised the Group they were awaiting responses from some Ministers on the views of their Departments and bodies under their aegis on the implementation of the procurement reform programme to date, and any recommendations they may have for improvements. Responses had been requested by 31 March which was extended to 10 June. Submissions have been received from ISME, Chambers Ireland and CIF on this matter. CIF indicated they were feeding into the Government Contracts Committee for Construction's (GCCC) review of the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF).

The Minister of State wrote to the opposition spokesperson on procurement inviting them to contribute to the review process but no responses have been received. Feedback from the review process will be presented to the Interim Public Procurement Reform Board and the Procurement Executive and will feed into recommendations to the Minister and Minister of State with a view to bringing proposals for refinement to Government.

4. Communication Strategy Update

In response to industry representative requests to see more sectoral/category oriented events and events pitched to a higher level, OGP will stage supplier engagement events in Facilities Management (FM) later this year and in the ICT categories in early 2020. OGP will also look to align events with the renewal of second generation frameworks over the course of 2020 and 2021 so that industry representatives can feed into the process and their members will know in advance about upcoming opportunities. OGP will contact members of the SME Communications Strategy sub group with a view to teasing out what industry representative bodies mean by 'higher level content' in procurement related events. The Minister of State would like the sectors to be more involved i.e. Health, Education, Local and Central Government and Defence. He stated the need to spread the net wider, more engagement within the sectors may lead to better buy in to the events. The upcoming event in Sligo requested by SFA was cited as a good example of responding to needs. There was a general consensus that there is a lack of awareness amongst smaller organisations about public procurement. DBEI advised they have a webpage specifically to assist SMEs and they would be happy to promote events on it as well as creating a link to the OGP website.

5. Terms of Reference for the Group

A draft revised Terms of Reference for the Group had been circulated in advance of the previous meeting in March, and members of the Group were asked to submit any comments they had on the draft which are still awaited.

The OGP highlighted the achievements of the Group over the prior five years as requested by the Minister of State at the meeting in March. These are as follows:-

Year	Achievement
2014	Quarterly meetings of the SME Advisory Group, chaired by Minister of State (PfG) Dissemination of the OGP model to representative members Publication of Circular 10/14
2015	Establishment of the Tender Advisory Service (TAS)
2016	Publication of the first report on the work of TAS Supporting Ministerial-lead procurement briefing events
2017	External review of TAS (PfG) Establishment of the SME Communications Strategy Sub Group Supporting Ministerial-lead procurement briefing events
2018	Consultation on the merits of establishing a Procurement Ombudsman (PfG) Roll out of the communications strategy and breakfast briefings TAS rebranding and relaunch Consultation on increasing advertising threshold on eTenders from €25k to €50k
2019	Terms of reference for the Group is under revision Continued refinement of the communications strategy Consultation on the Minister of State's Proposals to refine the public procurement model (ongoing)

OGP agreed to look into undertaking a survey of suppliers (as had been done in the past) following a suggestion from the group. Such a survey might also seek feedback from suppliers on their experience of using eTenders. It was suggested that survey results could inform the revised TOR as currently drafted.

6. A.O.B.

Social Considerations Advisory Group

The OGP advised that the Social Considerations Advisory Group held their first meeting in March 2019 with the next one due to take place at the end of June. The OGP are working with the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment in the development of frameworks that may have a social/environmental element incorporated and the impact on SMEs is being considered in this process.

eInvoicing

The Directive on eInvoicing has been transposed and the Statutory Instrument is with Minister Donohoe for signature.

Other

Ibec advised that a report has been published by Senator Pádraig Ó'Céidigh and the Seanad Public Consultation Committee following consultation with the SME sector which contained a section on SMEs and public procurement which should be of interest to the Group.