

## SME Advisory Group

Thursday 8th March 2018

South Block, Government Buildings, Merrion Street, Dublin 2

### Minutes

#### Attendees:

Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan - Chair		Paul Quinn - OGP	
Jim Deane, OGP	Derek Flanagan - OGP	Linda Barry - SFA	
Neil McDonnell - ISME	Sarah Freeman - Chambers	Catherine Curran - DBEI	
Tonia Spollen Behrens - EI	Harry O'Rahilly - CCPC	Sean Downey - CIF	
Aidan Sweeney - IBEC	Joan Grogan - OGP	Jason Coyle - OGP	

#### Apologies:

Margaret Hearty - InterTrade Ireland	Marguerite Burke - EI
Grant Gilmore - InterTrade Ireland	Enda McDonnell - EI
Karl Ryan – OGP	John Shine - CCPC

#### 1. Minutes of previous meeting

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.

#### 2. Advertising Threshold for eTenders

The Minister thanked the group for their input into the discussions regarding raising the threshold for advertising on eTenders. He advised he would discuss the matter with Minister Donohoe and would advise the Group of the decision.

#### 3. Relaunch of the Tender Advisory Service (TAS)

The OGP updated the group regarding the relaunch of the Tender Advisory Service. The short term recommendation to increase the knowledge and awareness of the service would tie in with the SME communication strategy. The issue of any perception of bias would be addressed by emphasising that the OGP Policy Unit does not have any role in OGP sourcing or operational matters and also by establishing an Expert Panel, where appropriate, assigned by the Procurement Executive. The OGP thanked the group for their feedback on the external review. The OGP again reiterated there are other mechanisms for assisting tenderers with queries via the Customer Services Helpline and the Key

Account Managers who work directly with the other sector parties i.e. Health, Education, Defence and Local Government.

The question of establishing a similar service for works was raised. The OGP advised that there are already formal and informal resolution mechanisms in place for works.

The review of TAS and of the consultation process should be finalised in the coming weeks with a relaunch of the service following thereafter. It was confirmed that the OGP would revert back to the group before the relaunch.

#### 4. Programme for Government Review

The OGP have been working through four of the five strands of the Programme for Government relating to public procurement and advised they will look into the fifth strand, i.e. consultation on the merits of establishing an Office of the Procurement Ombudsman. The Minister requested that the analysis as previously outlined commences as soon as possible after the relaunch of TAS and suggested that feedback is given to the group via the OGP on models in other jurisdictions, the discussions at EU level and the current practice in Ireland. The cost of an Ombudsman to the public sector and the supplier sector and the impact on the delivery of public services should be taken into account.

#### 5. Communication Strategy Update

The OGP thanked SFA and IBEC for organising and hosting the first Breakfast Briefing which had a large attendance and was covered by media. The second event took place on 28 February in Waterford with the support of the local Chambers of Commerce, and although high numbers registered, attendance was affected by the extreme weather conditions but there was still a good turnout. The next one is scheduled to take place in Athlone on 11 April.

The OGP confirmed that the feedback regarding the videos was very good and advised there was new commentary regarding consortia which is good for the SME sector. The Architects Group case study was deemed a good example of how this can work. The use of social media was proving very effective. The Minister advised that he is considering inviting the Taoiseach and some other Ministers to attend a procurement event.

## 6. A.O.B.

The next stage for the invoicing project is a public consultation. The representative bodies were advised to avail of this opportunity

ISME raised a number of issues regarding costs of bidding for competitions, the plight of smaller contractors and the financial standing of companies awarded public contracts. The SFA raised concerns re late payments and the CIF said that below cost bidding is still a factor in works contracts. The OGP said that there is a Government Contracts Act whereby subcontractors can take action if they are not being paid. They also advised that the financial and economic standing of companies was a key consideration in the evaluation of any bid to protect the tax payers' interests.

EI advised there will be a Meet the Buyer event for Social Housing on 14th March 2018.