

## SME Advisory Group

Wednesday 6th March 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	Ian Talbot – Chambers
Declan Hughes - DBEI	Neil McDonnell – ISME	Neil Kerrigan – EI
Tonia Spollen Behrens - EI	Elizabeth Bowen – SFA	Grant Gilmore - ITI
Derek Flanagan - OGP	Joan Grogan - OGP	Nora Bermingham - OGP

#### Apologies:

Paul Quinn - OGP	Margaret Hearty - ITI
Colm Ó'Gormáin - CCPC	Áine Carroll - CCPC

#### 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 thanked the Group for their submissions on the merits of establishing a Procurement Ombudsman in line with the Programme for Government commitment. Having taken their views into consideration, it was accepted that a wider public and political consultation would need to be carried out. The Group were asked to submit any further views in this regard.

The Minister advised that he intends to visit three other jurisdictions to meet his counterparts to see what review models they have in place, and how they are progressing. The EU Commission's report was discussed and the Minister noted that each country is unique and we want to reflect best practice to suit our requirements.

Again, it was reiterated that, while the OGP understands the points raised by the representative bodies, consideration also has to be given to the impact on service delivery and procurement

processes, legislative and resource implications, potential delays in awards of contracts to business etc.

### 3. Minister of State's Proposals

The Minister advised that he and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform have written to Government Ministers to get 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. Their views are due back by the end of March. The Group had been requested at the previous meeting to submit their views on how the procurement process was working and were now requested to submit any further views and consult with their members on the matter. The OGP would forward a copy of the questions which had been issued to the Ministers to the Group to circulate to their members. The Minister and the OGP will reflect on the feedback from the consultation process with a view to bringing proposals for refinement to Government in the autumn.

The Minister suggested a possible once off meeting between the Group and the Procurement Executive comprising of representatives from the Health, Education, Local and Central Government and Defence Sectors. This may be beneficial to the Group to have an open discussion on procurement. Once a date is set the Group should consult with their membership to determine, based on their experience, what should be discussed. The consensus of the Group was that this would be beneficial.

### 4. Communication Strategy Update

The SME Communication Strategy Sub Group met in February where event content and event locations were discussed. It was decided to go ahead with three Breakfast Briefings in 2019 with additional dates if required. The Industry Representatives confirmed their willingness to host events. A discussion was held on the types of events being held and the level they were pitched at. The Group feel that there should be more sectoral/category oriented events and pitched to a higher level. The OGP advised that the SME Communication Strategy Sub Group had initially been set up to initiate a programme of Breakfast Briefings for those with little or no knowledge of access to public procurement. The Group originally included communication specialists from the various Departments and Industry Representative Groups. It was agreed that the OGP would speak to their Sourcing Team with regard the pipeline for renewal of Frameworks and the SME Communication Strategy Subgroup meeting would be the forum for continuing this discussion.

## 5. Terms of Reference for the Group

A draft revised Terms of Reference for the Group had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The OGP suggested it should be reviewed to better reflect the purpose and objectives of the group and the two-way nature of the forum as the Group has been running in its current format since 2014. The Minister and the Government believe the Group should continue but said it was a good time to reflect on its purpose and was open to suggestions as to where it saw itself going forward and any changes required. The general consensus was that the Group should continue and some of the successful outcomes of the Group were highlighted. A possible suggestion was to widen the brief. The Minister suggested this could be an opportune time to look back over the prior five years, reflect on the achievements and use this to inform the work of the SME AG in the future.

## 6. A.O.B.

### Social Considerations Advisory Group

Following the launch of the Social Considerations Information Note in December 2019, a Social Considerations Advisory Group is being formed and the first meeting is due to take place on 12 March 2019. As previously advised, the OGP, as a central purchasing body, cannot decide for other contracting authorities or at a whole-of-Government level what social considerations should be included in the frameworks and contracts that it puts in place on their behalf. It requires guidance from policy departments and the Social Considerations Advisory Group will facilitate this process. It was reiterated again that the potential impact on the SME sector will be a key consideration. The issue of single use plastics was raised in light of the recent announcement on their ban by Minister Bruton and how it would be implemented. OGP advised that the views of the Group would feed into the Social Considerations Advisory Group.

The Minister also suggested arranging a meeting with the opposition spokespersons and the Group to explain SME concerns including potential unintended consequences of including social considerations in public procurement

### Brexit

There was no further update with regards Brexit but the Group were requested to continue to bring to their members attention the help and supports available from Government, e.g. the Government's [gov.uk/Brexit](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/brexit) website provides information on the important steps that are being taken to prepare for

Brexit. ITI requested the group tell their members about the Brexit Vouchers which are available to cross-border traders. Information can be found on their website.

### eInvoicing

The deadline for the transposition of the eInvoicing Directive is 18 April 2019 for central Government.