



## SME Advisory Group

Meeting 26 September 2023

### Minutes

#### Attendees:

Minister of State Ossian Smyth - Chair	Anne Stewart - OGP	Edwina Steele - OGP
Fergal Grogan - OGP	Fiona Costelloe - OGP	Martin O' Gorman - OGP
Rory Bonass - OGP	Ross Church - DETE	Aidan Sweeney - Ibec
Deirdre McPartlin - Enterprise Ireland	Paul Maguire - Enterprise Ireland	Elizabeth Bowen - Small Firms Association
Grant Gilmore - InterTrade Ireland	Shane Conneely - Chambers Ireland	Shane Hughes - Chambers Ireland
Gillian Ross - CIF	Jonathan Small - CCPC	

#### Apologies:

Neil McDonnell - ISME	
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#### 1. Previous Minutes and Actions Arising

The Minister welcomed the group and acknowledged Brendan Whelan's move from the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), along with Sean Downey (CIF), Laura Byrne (DETE), and Karen Hynes (DETE). Minister welcomed Edwina Steele, who has taken over the position as Head of Public Procurement Policy for Goods and Services, and Ross Church from DETE. The Minister commenced a tour de table. The minutes of the previous meeting of 19 June were agreed. Actions from the previous meeting, as below were completed:

- *eTenders communications to be discussed at the next SME Advisory Communications sub-group.* This item will be included on the Agenda for the next meeting scheduled for 16 October.
- *OGP to circulate Apprenticeship and Public Procurement Information Note to the group.* A link was circulated to the group.

#### 2. eTenders

Anne Stewart (AS) from the OGP provided an update to the group on developments since the launch of the new eTenders on 15 May. AS highlighted 4 months into the new platform; the number of queries has reduced, 3,800 competitions have been launched, alerts have been turned off the old system and a focus group was assembled of representatives to assist with solutions for Utilities. AS signposted the introduction of eForms which will go live this October. AS welcomed any feedback from the group.

SFA highlighted issues around private companies providing training, the overall look, lack of intuitive nature of the system and inaccessible language. It was recognised that any queries raised have been well answered. AS noted some private companies and a podcast offering training had to be contacted as they were providing inaccurate information. AS confirmed there are change requests



currently in to make enhance functionality and appearance. AS mentioned the OGP are considering their own podcast and communication channels as well as the possibility for events similar to what other organisations are currently holding.

Ibec asked if the number of users registered on the system was available. AS confirmed there are around 27,000 users now registered on the platform.

CIF advised that it has compiled a 3-page document setting out some issues which will be forwarded to the Minister and OGP.

Chambers noted the smooth transition to the new platform and asked if there has been any difference seen in the level of competition. AS confirmed that the level of competition is in line with the old platform. Ibec highlighted the Court of Auditors report on Competition which was due to be published this month but is now not likely to be published until the end of the year. EI noted that barriers experienced in competitions is most likely a combination of training, policy and processes. EI highlighted that 80% of the 137 tenders, which accounted to over 5 million from January to February, had no lots. A discussion of areas for inclusion in the Commercial Skills Training took place including suggestions of how to undertake successful market research and analysis and incorporating lotting in procurements. FG added that the OGP are also looking at the area of preliminary market consultation (PMC) which can also assist with considering lots and premarket analysis and suggested that PMC be included on the agenda for the next meeting. The group agreed with this. EI advised that group that there will be a UK Public Sector Forum held in East Point on 19 October.

**Action:** Preliminary Market Consultation with be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **3. Strategic Public Procurement**

Minister updated the group on the upcoming launch of a public consultation on the GPP Strategy and Action Plan. FG noted that currently the EPA is seeking feedback on its GPP guidance and associated criteria. The link to this consultation will be circulated to the group as the deadline to complete the form is 29 September. FG also advised that the GPP Criteria Search tool has been translated into Irish.

**Action:** OGP to circulate links to consultation relating to GPP Strategy and EPA guidance.

### **4. Macroeconomic Issues**

Minister open the floor to any macroeconomic issues the group may wish to raise. SFA raised that insurance levels, as found in their survey conducted over the summer, are the third biggest cost to small businesses. Other major costs to businesses include commercial rent, cost of conducting business, statutory sick pay leave and wages. Minister acknowledged these issues and advised SFA that insurance issues could be raised with Minister of State Jennifer Carroll MacNeill who has special responsibility for Financial Services, Credit Unions and Insurance in the Department of Finance. Minister noted that at the last meeting the issue of security clearance for businesses was raised as there is no system for non-government officials to get official security clearance in Ireland. Minister advised the group of work taking place to develop legislation in this area and will request that industry representative bodies are involved in any consultation.

### **5. A.O.B.**

FG highlighted that the new National Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services are expected to be published shortly. Once published this will be circulated to the group. It was confirmed that this is a separate document to the Guide for SMEs that Local Government has



developed. Ibec raised that Dublin City Council have been doing some work on Community Wealth Building. Ibec noted that Dublin City Council are developing a strategy plan on this, and suggested they contact the OGP as some UK consultants have been used. Minister asked if possible to please send any copy of this strategy to the group. AS raised concerns of UK consultants being involved with this as information provided may not be accurate due to the UK no longer being in the EU and under the same legislation. EI also highlighted the Uisce Éireann event which will be taking place on 25 October with over 200 companies each day attending. No further business was raised and the meeting was brought to a close.

**Action:** OGP to circulate updated National Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services.