



Department of
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Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont

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AQO 6462/11-15

Dear Members

In answer to AQO 6462/11-15 during Oral Questions on 30 June 2014, I undertook to supply Members with a detailed list of measures aimed at increasing SME access to public procurement.

A document is attached which provides this information.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hamilton MLA

DESCRIPTION:

**MEASURES AIMED AT INCREASING SME ACCESS TO PUBLIC
PROCUREMENT**

AQO:

6462

DEPARTMENTAL CONTACT DETAILS:

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The Procurement Board for Northern Ireland has taken forward a simplification agenda aimed at making our procurement processes less bureaucratic and more SME friendly. A number of initiatives aimed at increasing SME access to public procurement opportunities include:

- Publication of guidance aimed at helping SMEs access contracting opportunities.
- Publication of guidance for public sector purchasers on removing barriers to SME participation and promoting the benefits of doing business with SMEs.
- Publication of guidance aimed at protecting the position of subcontractors working on government construction contracts.
- All Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) contracts over £30,000 are advertised on the e-Sourcing NI portal, ensuring a high level of visibility of public sector tendering opportunities.
- Developing a purchaser's portal for supplies contracts with values less than £30k. The portal is populated with details of companies registered on the procurement portal.
- Requiring CoPEs to develop procurement strategies, which include early engagement with local suppliers, for all contracts valued over the EU the threshold.
- CPD has worked with CoPEs and the CBI to standardise contract terms and conditions across all Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies. They will be implemented in all contracts by 1 October 2014.
- Inclusion of a prompt payment clause as a standard condition of contract.
- Simplifying procurement processes for contracts valued at under the EU threshold by producing clearer specifications, removing the minimum

eligibility requirements for low value supplies and services contracts and awarding contracts on lowest price where possible.

- Reducing liability and insurance requirements for tenderers by making them proportionate to the risks associated with the contract.
- Publication of all contract awards over £30,000 on CoPE websites, including those resulting from single tender actions.
- Publication of up to date data provided by CoPEs on the value of contract awards to SMEs.
- CPD working closely with the All Island Public Procurement Steering Group, including key partners Invest NI and InterTradeIreland, to ensure practical advice and information on public procurement is available to SME's. Workshops are available to help suppliers develop the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to tender successfully for public sector contracts, in addition to a set of helpful online resources. Regular 'Meet the Buyer' events enable over 1,000 suppliers to meet with public sector buyers each year, gaining an insight into the tendering process and how they can gain access to it.
- The use of a Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQ) has been eliminated for many contracts below £100,000;
- Health and Safety assessments in construction procurements have been simplified through the use of third party accreditation
- The requirement to provide evidence of financial standing for tenders for supplies or services contracts below the value of EU thresholds has been removed.