



Procurement Policy Note - Extension of the Mystery Shopper service

Information Note 02/14

06 February 2014

Issue

1. The Government has decided to extend the Cabinet Office's Mystery Shopper service to carry out spot checks on procurement processes as well as continuing to deal with referrals raised by SMEs and other concerned suppliers. The objective is to raise the commercial capability of contracting authorities through their adoption of good procurement policy and practice and ensuring that public procurements do not impose unnecessary barriers to small businesses when bidding for public contracts. Spot checks will be undertaken by examining procurement documents, usually online, on procurement portals and checking for compliance with the relevant procurement policy notes.
2. This extension of the Mystery Shopper scheme was announced in the publication Small Business GREAT Ambition¹. As with existing referrals to the Mystery Shopper scheme, following discussion with contracting authorities, the result of spot checks will be published on GOV.UK so that poor practice by public bodies and their contractors can be challenged and good practice identified.

Timing

3. The Cabinet Office's mystery shopper team will commence spot checks of procurements across all contracting authorities from the date of this PPN.

Scope

4. This PPN is for the information of all central government departments, their Executive Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, Executive Agencies and the bodies in the wider public sector in England.

Dissemination

5. Please circulate this document within your organisation, drawing it to the attention of those with a purchasing role. For central government departments this will include any of your Executive Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies and to all contracting authorities including the wider public sector for which you are responsible.

Contact

6. Enquiries about this PPN should be directed to the Service Desk 0845 000 4999 servicedesk@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk.

Background

7. The Mystery Shopper scheme was launched by the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office in

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266212/bis-13-1313-small-business-great-ambition-FINAL.pdf



Cabinet Office

February 2011 to allow concerns about public procurement processes and practice to be raised by SMEs, and other suppliers, including charitable and voluntary organizations and social enterprises. The scheme's role is to assist contracting authorities in implementing good procurement policy and practice. The Cabinet Office investigates these concerns, where necessary makes recommendations and publishes the results of cases on GOV.UK.² A mystery shopper progress report was published in December 2012 which highlights the key findings from cases investigated up to that date.³ Further details of the mystery shopper scheme, including its scope and remit can be found on GOV.UK.⁴

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mystery-shopper-results>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79307/Mystery_Shopper_Progress_Report_18-DEC-2012.pdf

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mystery-shopper-scope-and-remit>