



Open Contracting Partnership submission of evidence to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee for the Procurement Bill [HL] 218 2022-23 (as brought from the House of Lords, 14th December 2022)

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Supplementary Evidence on Procurement Dashboards

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Contents

1. Evidence on procurement dashboards	1
2. Comments on the procurement dashboards	1
2.1 Public Bill Committee sessions	1
3. Procurement dashboards and the Open Contracting Data Standard	2
3.1 Avoiding the weaknesses of the existing online systems	2
3.2 Open Contracting Data Standard	6
3.3 Consultation and engagement on secondary legislation	6

1. Evidence on procurement dashboards

The [Open Contracting Partnership](#) submitted evidence¹ to the Committee on 23rd January 2023. Given subsequent statements made during the Public Bill Committee sittings about the online system and procurement dashboards, we would like this additional evidence to be considered by the Committee.

2. Comments on the procurement dashboards

2.1 Public Bill Committee sessions

We are pleased that the subject of procurement dashboards is being discussed² during the Public Bill Committee sessions. For the new online system to deliver the benefits expected by the government and the savings and efficiency gains anticipated in the Impact Assessment, it will be important to provide the private sector, civil society and contracting authorities with user-friendly dashboards to help analyse and understand the data in the procurement notices.

The subject was discussed in both the House of Lords and the Commons including by Alex Burghart (Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office) and Florence Eshalomi, Shadow Minister (Cabinet Office) on 31st January and by Angela Rayner, Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9th January 2023.³

¹ Written evidence submitted by the Open Contracting Partnership to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee for the Procurement Bill [HL] 218 2022-23 (as brought from the House of Lords, 14 December 2022) (PB06) <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/49617/documents/2857>

² Parliamentary Debates House Of Commons Official Report General Committees Public Bill Committee Procurement Bill [Lords]. First Sitting Tuesday 31 January 2023. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0218/PBC218_ProcurementBill_1st8th_Compilation_09_02_2023.pdf

³ Procurement Bill [Lords] Volume 725: debated on Monday 9 January 2023 [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-09/debates/2936011F-A818-40FC-941B-D53E05672870/ProcurementBill\(Lords\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-09/debates/2936011F-A818-40FC-941B-D53E05672870/ProcurementBill(Lords))

We were pleased to see that in the debate in the House of Lords on 30th November 2022, Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con) said:

“This means everyone will have access to public procurement data and can track contracts as they progress through the commercial lifecycle from tender to award and delivery. Citizens will be able to scrutinise contracting authority decisions; suppliers will be able to identify new opportunities to bid and collaborate; and buyers will be able to analyse the market and benchmark their performance against others, for example on their spend with SMEs.”

The ambition is clearly there in the Government and Opposition parties to deliver major reforms and improvements to the way procurement information and data are published and used, which we strongly support. We wanted in this submission to draw together some global best practices that the UK should be adopting to deliver on those ambitions.

3. Procurement dashboards and the Open Contracting Data Standard

3.1 Avoiding the weaknesses of the existing online systems

The current online systems called Contracts Finder and Find a Tender Service focus on the publication of procurement notices, but they are not designed to enable an SME, citizen or contracting authority to easily analyse the information they contain. The search tools within both of these systems are basic and text based around specific notices. So, for example:

- You can search for and find specific notices but you cannot get any market level intelligence easily covering, say, purchasing patterns, aggregate amounts of spending, who bid on contracts, levels of competition or indeed what procurement method was used to award a contract (direct vs competitive etc).
- It is not as easy as it should be to identify which tenders and contracts have been issued by a particular contracting authority or how many contracts have been awarded to SMEs for a particular region or authority.
- You can search by some basic parameters including by CPV code but again, you could not understand the market size or aggregate amount of spending.
- Similarly, it is not easy to identify which contracts have been won by a particular supplier, which is critical market intelligence for suppliers and vitally important for the government to manage risk and avoid a repeat of the chaos following the collapse of Carillon.
- Data quality, timeliness and completeness is poor. Key items of data are often missing in current notices and they are often filed very late or not at all.

Although, to the government’s credit, open data can be downloaded from these online systems for analysis, the technical skills needed to do this and interrogate and analyse the

open data⁴ are well beyond that of the average citizen, buyer or SME who would need to be able to use APIs (Application Programme Interface), JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) and Extensible Markup Language (XML) files.

The Cabinet Office have also flagged these challenges in [their excellent paper on their transparency ambitions for the new UK reforms](#).⁵ To quote: “While we have made great strides in creating a more transparent public procurement system, our current arrangements are limited in a number of ways.

- Disparate and unconnected datasets - only information on above-threshold tenders and contract awards are published centrally - other important information on the rest of the procurement lifecycle (e.g. contract performance, spending) if available, is on different websites or data.gov.uk. Standard contract identifiers are rarely used, meaning these datasets are also impossible to connect.
- No single picture of procurement - There are multiple portals where information on tenders and contract awards are published, meaning that to get a full picture of what is happening you need to check each different portal. Meanwhile, some contracts will be published in multiple places, meaning even if you do combine datasets, you may need to spend time identifying where you have duplicated data. Publication rules also mean some contracts are not consistently published e.g. call offs from framework agreements.
- Lots of data, little insight - public bodies spend time and energy publishing information about their procurement. While we think this is a good investment, we recognise that they do not always have the tools to unlock more of the valuable insight they could collectively get from this information.
- Lack of organisational identifiers - data on opportunities and contracts is often published without organisation identifiers, which are key to identifying all contracts let by a particular buyer, or held by a particular supplier. They are also essential for larger-scale analysis, e.g. looking at contracts across regions, types of authority or categories of suppliers.”

In short, there is a major gap in the comprehensiveness, the quality and the useability of UK procurement information and the new portal will be vital to bridging these but everyone’s benefit including to frontline procurement officials. It will also be important for wider public policy issues to understand the depth and extent of the UK government’s interaction with the private sector and what is working and what isn’t: comprehensive information might for example reveal who is procuring climate friendly goods and infrastructure and who isn’t or whether there is an over-reliance on the big four management consultancies in UK government policy making and delivery.

One way of bringing some well-needed transparency into the procurement market is to visualise who is doing what, when and how: where do public funds go and how are

⁴ Find a Tender Service Data and API documentation <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Developer/Documentation> and Contracts Finder API Help Page <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/apidocumentation>

⁵ Cabinet Office Policy Paper. Transforming Public Procurement - our transparency ambition.

stakeholders connected? How have these networks evolved over time? Presenting this data in a concise manner is not just a way to uncover unrealized business opportunities but also helps detect patterns of collusion and corruption. Data visualisation using a dashboard is a fantastic approach to make sense of data and to provide better insight into the complex world of procurement.

Ukraine's Prozorro public procurement open data infrastructure, red flags analytics and its excellent public procurement dashboards rightly drew considerable praise in the political debate about the UK Bill. It is worth pointing out that Prozorro was conceived and delivered on a budget of around \$5m which is a relatively minimal cost, especially in light of the aggregate savings in the order of \$1bn a year from Ukraine's eGP reforms.

Prozorro is not just about transparency and accessibility of information, it has an advanced business intelligence analytical model underneath it that allows procurement and oversight authorities to understand what is happening in the marketplace including detecting and analysing anomalous contracting behaviours. Imagine the value of that to dealing with the challenges of Covid emergency procurement. [Here is the testimony directly on the value of that](#) from Vasyl Zadorny, Prozorro's Chief Executive Officer (in it now a state-owned enterprise in Ukraine).⁶ [Here is a worked example](#) of how you can use that business intelligence engine for monitoring procurement risks.⁷

Ukraine is not the only country exploiting the potential of using dashboards to enable stakeholders to understand and scrutinise public procurement activities for market intelligence, transparency and accountability and sharing information between contracting authorities.

To that end, we commend to the Committee's attention our organisation's [best practices guidance around developing public procurement dashboards and portals](#) which contains many compelling examples from across the world and from many countries with less public resources than the UK.⁸

We also have a [slideshow accessible here](#) if the Committee would like to see the design and data visualisation approaches of some of the better portals around the world that could inspire the UK.

Some of best portals and data dashboards are accessible at:

- Chile: <https://datos-abiertos.chilecompra.cl/>
- Paraguay: <https://www.contrataciones.gov.py/dncp/red-flags.html#sar>
- Mexico: <https://smpu.nl.gob.mx/transparencia/contrataciones>

⁶ Zadorny, V. 16 April 2020. How open contracting approaches help Ukraine to tackle COVID-19. <https://www.open-contracting.org/2020/04/16/how-open-contracting-approaches-help-ukraine-to-tackle-covid-19/>

⁷ Open Contracting Partnership 23 March 2020.. Data & transparency of emergency COVID19 procurement: an example for OECD best practices from Ukraine. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ofEBCQmSaRAAzUs2OPX0Vrkau7R_Qdim7-IDhe_hVGk/edit?usp=sharing

⁸ Open Contracting Partnership. 2022. Best practices for developing open contracting data portals report (with examples). Accessible at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MI6dEX4nuU7NczgwAuUVBPmD3IWD0Pc2ikr6LPZf1hE/edit#heading=h.1k2f6qsm67ks>

- Indonesia: <https://opentender.net/>
- Italy: <https://www.appaltipop.it/it>
- Kazakhstan: <https://opentender.kz/>

We also note how an ecosystem of analysis can thrive once good data is available and publicly accessible. Here is a great example from Chile where a public interest organisation [Observatorio Fiscal's](#) created a [Compras Gobierno Central portal](#) to answer basic public interest around public procurement in the country. We also note sophisticated civic monitoring tools such as [Dozorro.org](#) in Ukraine,⁹ [Reaccion](#) in Paraguay¹⁰ or [Budeshi](#) in Nigeria¹¹ or others that harnessed a network of citizen corruption fighters to track public contracts and make sure that public spending delivers results for ordinary citizens.

Lastly, we note an excellent and innovative project by the British Embassy in Colombia to work with OCP to provide user-friendly data to small businesses and entrepreneurs in several Colombian cities including [Palmira](#), [Cali](#), [Bogotá](#), and [Manizales](#) with highly beneficial effects on the openness, fairness and economic inclusion of public contracts there. The UK is doing great work on this abroad, it should be doing it at home too!

For another example of what can be achieved, please see the “OCDS based BI tool for Moldova” <https://mtender.gov.md/en/public/open-data>, which was developed by the Open Contracting Partnership and designed to provide public access to tools for quick and convenient analysis of procurement across:

- items of purchase and their classifiers;
- procuring entities;
- bidders (suppliers);
- types, statuses of tenders and lots;
- complaints and their characteristics;

So, we believe that there is a compelling opportunity for user-friendly dashboards and data visualisations to be incorporated into the new online platform when it is launched in 2024.

The Government already has some excellent experience in this area, with the Crown Commercial Services providing a [publicly accessible dashboard](#)¹² giving information on the contracts awarded under the G-Cloud and Digital Outcomes and Specialists (DOS) services which we suggest could be a model for the new online platform.

⁹ Open Contracting Partnership. 14 September 2020. How do you build a network of citizen corruption fighters? Ask Ukraine’s revolutionaries

<https://www.open-contracting.org/2020/09/14/dozorro-a-network-of-citizen-corruption-fighters/>

¹⁰Open Contracting Partnership. 24 January 2019. Open data and collective action: How student activists help neglected schools in Paraguay.

<https://medium.com/open-contracting-stories/open-data-and-collective-action-how-student-activists-help-neglected-schools-in-paraguay-6c6596655cf2>

¹¹ Nyager,S. 29 February 2016. How Budeshi can help Nigeria track public services and tackle corruption using open data.

<https://www.open-contracting.org/2016/02/29/how-budeshi-can-help-nigeria-track-public-services-and-tackle-corruption-using-open-data/>

¹² Crown Commercial Services Digital Outcomes and Specialists and G-Cloud sales

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoibWV2ZDc5LTNlODctNGNkMy05Nzk5LWZmZDQzMTQzZWE1ZSIsImMiOiJh9>

The team who will be driving these innovations at the Cabinet Office and elsewhere should be given the resources to do an outstanding job. We note that Impact Assessment for the Procurement Bill estimates the set-up costs of the new online platform to be only £150,000, with the remainder of the 10-year budgeted cost of £19.6 million needed for running costs, capital expenditure and potential future development costs of £600,000.¹³

We think that investment is too low relative to the benefits and impacts from what can be achieved from having a single source of truth and analysis on UK contracts. We note that the Impact Assessment also suggests that the main opportunity for financial savings will come through increased competition for government contracts. This makes it even more important that the online platform is designed to be as intuitive as possible and includes an innovative set of dashboards and is not simply an updated version of Find a Tender Service with a simplified set of procurement notices if you are going to have market level analysis and improve competition.

3.2 Open Contracting Data Standard

The Government have set out their intention to align the new platform with the [Open Contracting Data Standard](#) (OCDS), which could simplify the design and delivery of a variety of dashboards for the new online platform because the Open Contracting Partnership has designed OCDS with data accessibility and useability in mind.¹⁴ The many best practice dashboards that we shared in the previous section are all OCDS-driven so there is a wealth of free, adaptable tools and visualisations to help the UK government deliver on its data ambitions.

3.3 Consultation and engagement on secondary legislation

We appreciate that it is not appropriate for the Bill to go into detail about the functionality of the new online platform, as it will be covered by secondary legislation accompanying the new Procurement Act.

That said, the new regulations will be critical to delivering the outcomes from the procurement reforms, and we welcome that they will be scrutinised and debated in Parliament before coming into force.

We support the comment made by the Local Government Association in their evidence to the Committee that early engagement from Cabinet Office on the secondary legislation is welcome, and we would add, critical to the success of the procurement reforms and the design of the online platform which will play a critical role. We hope that our best practices guidance and the inspiration examples from around the world will help lift everyone's ambitions around what is possible and to muster resources to do the job properly.

Many thanks again for your time to read and consider this submission.

[ENDS]

¹³ Procurement Reform Bill Impact Assessment IA No: CO2024 21/04/2022
<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/46429/documents/1767>

¹⁴ Simperl, E. and Koesten, J. 19 February 2020. Showing where taxpayers' money goes: some guidelines on procurement data visualization
<https://www.open-contracting.org/2020/02/19/showing-where-taxpayers-money-goes-some-guidelines-on-procurement-data-visualization/>