

Supplying the Ministry of Justice

Guidance for

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

and

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises

Foreword from the Chief Commercial Officer

“In an increasingly competitive environment, ensuring that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) have the necessary support to bid and win contracts is an important priority of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

Our ambition is to make the MOJ’s procurement process more accessible, transparent and effective for all. I’m very pleased to introduce this guidance as a significant step towards this goal.

Whether you’re an experienced supplier or considering bidding for your very first contract, you’ll find practical, step-by-step advice here to help you identify opportunities, submit strong bids and - most importantly - win work with us.

The government’s procurement agenda emphasises the importance of supporting SMEs and VCSEs, and at the MOJ, we are committed to giving you the knowledge, tools and confidence to succeed. This guidance is just the start, so dive in, explore and see where it can take you.”



Tim Snow
Chief Commercial Officer
Ministry of Justice

Coming up...

Introduction

Plan

Define

Procure

Manage

**Further
Support**



Introduction

This guide is for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) who are interested in supplying goods or services to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Most of the content in this guide would also be suitable for those interested in supplying to other government departments.

We've designed it to be simple and practical, with step-by-step guidance and useful tips to help you understand and engage with procurement opportunities from the MOJ. Whether you're new to bidding for government work or looking to improve your chances of success, this guide aims to make the process clearer.

What is public sector procurement?

Procurement is how organisations buy goods, services or works from external suppliers. In the MOJ, this means using taxpayers' money to buy the things we need, from prison catering and court IT systems to consultancy and construction.

Unlike many private companies, public bodies like the MOJ must follow strict rules to make sure public money is spent properly. These rules help us buy in a way that is fair, transparent and provides value for money. They also support important goals like encouraging economic growth and innovation, supporting local businesses and delivering social value.

While the process can seem complex at first, this guide will walk you through it and show how your organisation can get involved.



Procurement Regulations

The Procurement Act 2023 came into effect in February 2025 and is shaping how the government buys goods, works and services. The Procurement Act 2023 aims to make procurement more simple, flexible and transparent, while opening opportunities for suppliers of all sizes, including SMEs and VCSEs.

Read more about what has changed: [The Procurement Act 2023: A short guide for suppliers](#)

Tip: CCS glossary

Use the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) glossary to familiarise yourself with procurement terms and jargon.

[CCS Procurement Glossary](#)

New and old regulations - which apply?

As we transition to the Procurement Act 2023, government buyers may still run some procurements under previous regulations (such as Public Contracts Regulations 2015). This may happen because the procurement started before the new rules took effect, or because it's being run through a framework agreement that was set up under the old regime (more details on framework agreements on page 6).

As a supplier, this means you may see different rules or processes depending on when and how a contract is being run. Don't worry, each opportunity will make it clear which rules apply.



Tip: Understanding which rules apply

Procurement rules vary depending on the value and risk of the contract. Lower-value, lower-risk procurements may be completed relatively quickly - sometimes within a few months. Higher-value or higher-risk procurements are subject to more scrutiny and may take longer to be processed.

Always review the procurement documents carefully to understand the timeline, requirements and evaluation process.

Working with the MOJ as an SME or VCSE

The MOJ works closely with a wide range of SMEs and VCSEs, supporting vital services across prisons and probation (HMPPS), courts and tribunals (HMCTS), and other justice bodies. Together, we help provide effective punishment that cuts crime and ensure swifter justice for victims, reinforcing the UK's reputation as a beacon for justice and the rule of law.

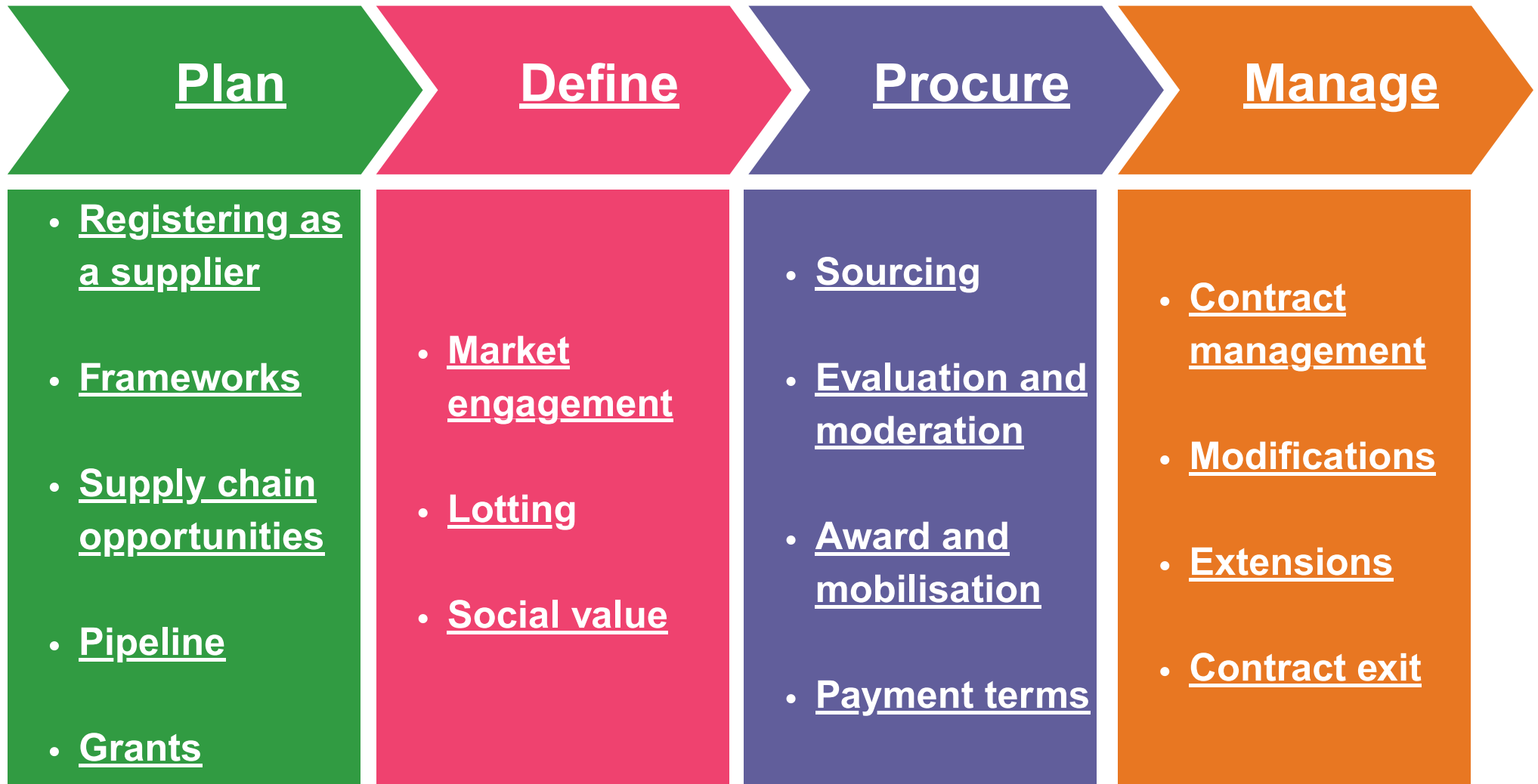
21%

21% of MOJ direct spend went to SMEs and VCSEs in the 2024/5 financial year.

£1.5B

This amounts to more than £1.5 billion worth of contracts being awarded to organisations like yours.

The Procurement Process





Plan: Getting ready to supply

Registering as a supplier

We use several platforms to advertise contract opportunities and engage with potential suppliers. Registering on these is often the first step to accessing work with the MOJ and other public bodies.

[Find a Tender Service \(FTS\)](#)

[Jaggaer](#)

The UK government's official platform for advertising contracts.

Use to: Search for contract opportunities

Tips for FTS:

- register for free and set up email alerts
- filter by procurement stage, location or value
- use the suitability filters to find opportunities for SMEs and VCSEs

For support, contact the FTS team using the [Contact Us page](#).

The official eSourcing platform used by the MOJ and several other government departments.

Use to: Access documentation and submit bids

Tips for Jaggaer:

- register for free. You'll need an account to engage with the MOJ
- use this [supplier guidance](#) to understand how to use the platform

For support, contact the central support team via esourcing@justice.gov.uk

Note: Under previous regulations, some opportunities were advertised on [Contracts Finder](#). While a few pre-transition opportunities may still be listed, the platform is currently being phased out.



Commercial Tools:

Frameworks

At the MOJ, many of our contracts are awarded through framework agreements. Frameworks are essentially a list of suppliers, with agreed terms and legal protections. Such agreements help speed up procurement and reduce duplication.

Tip: CCS guidance

[CCS: 5 Steps to Becoming a CCS Supplier](#)

See the below Crown Commercial Service (CCS) guidance to better understand and participate in framework agreements.

Dynamic purchasing system (DPS) and dynamic markets

The DPS is an electronic tool that is used to buy common goods and services. They are similar to framework agreements, but suppliers can join at any time during the life of the agreement. Under the Procurement Act 2023 the DPS is replaced by dynamic markets which support more open and responsive procurement of goods and services.

Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework agreements

The CCS manages many of the government's framework agreements. Suppliers can apply to join these agreements when they open for new applicants. Note: A framework can last several years and may not open to admit new suppliers during its lifetime.

Register to create a supplier account and participate in CCS tender opportunities here: [CCS](#)



Supply chain opportunities

Not all opportunities are directly suitable for SMEs or VCSEs. Some contracts - due to their size, complexity or risk - are awarded to larger suppliers, often referred to as Tier 1 contractors.

These suppliers often subcontract parts of the work, creating valuable Tier 2 opportunities, suitable for smaller organisations, like SMEs and VCSEs.

Where to find supply chain opportunities:

- supplier's own website
- industry portals (e.g., [CompeteFor](#) or [ConstructionLine](#))
- trade associations or industry events
- occasionally [Contracts Finder](#) (Note: this platform is being phased out)

Tip: Opportunities on Find a Tender Service (FTS)

Buyers will publish details of successful suppliers of contracts on FTS.

Find out who has been awarded relevant major contracts and contact them about subcontracting opportunities.

[Find a Tender Service](#)



Commercial pipelines

Public sector buyers are generally expected to regularly publish information about their commercial pipelines, detailing upcoming opportunities and allowing suppliers to better prepare in advance. These pipelines include expected contract values and estimated tender dates.

MOJ Pipeline Notices

Under the Procurement Act 2023, the MOJ will publish Pipeline Notices for contracts with an estimated value greater than £2 million.

These notices cover a reporting period of 18 months beginning on 1 April each year and are published on [Find a Tender Service](#).

Grants

The government also offers grants, which are different from contracts. A grant is funding to support the delivery of a public benefit, usually without a formal procurement process.

Search for open grant opportunities: [Find a Grant](#)



Define: Understanding the requirements

Market engagement

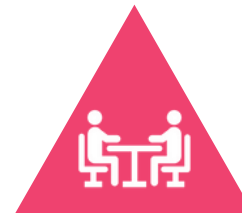
Public sector buyers regularly engage with potential suppliers before publishing a formal tender. This is an opportunity for you to:

- provide feedback to the buyer
- collectively influence specification and evaluation criteria
- discuss potential barriers facing SMEs and VCSEs

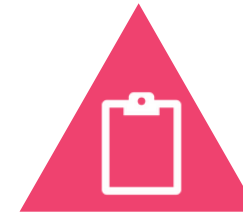
Types of engagement activity:



Webinars and supplier events



One-to-one meetings



Surveys and questionnaires



Site visits and demonstrations

Tips: Getting the most out of market engagement

1. Find engagement notices on [Find a Tender Service](#). Filter by procurement stage to find early engagement opportunities.
2. See [guidance](#) from the Crown Commercial Service on early market engagement and benefits for small businesses.
3. Take part in events actively to show your value and improve the tender.



Lotting - what are lots?

- Lotting is when a requirement is divided into smaller parts, known as lots.
- Each lot is effectively a separate bidding opportunity.
- Suppliers can bid for one or several lots.
- Lots may be divided by service type, geography, delivery phase or more.

Examples of lots

- A cleaning contract for courtrooms could be divided by region (e.g., London, north-east, Midlands, etc.)
- A facilities management contract for a prison could be broken into separate lots for different functions (e.g., security, maintenance and catering.)
- A digital support contract could be split by specialism (e.g., app development, cybersecurity, training, etc.)

Tip: Finding lotting opportunities

Buyers now have a duty to consider whether a contract can be split into lots.

Lots will be published on Find a Tender Service (FTS). Look out for procurement notices that mention “divided into lots” or describe different sections of the contract. Documentation on FTS will explain the scope and requirement of each lot.

[Find a Tender Service](#)



Social value in public procurement

Social value is about achieving wider benefits for society in addition to delivering the core requirements of a contract. This is an important element of public procurement that helps ensure that taxpayer money provides not just economic value, but positive social, environmental and community outcomes.

Public sector buyers are obligated to consider social value when designing and awarding contracts. Social value is built into the evaluation criteria of a procurement and usually contributes to between 10% and 20% of the overall score (though this may vary depending on the contract).

Social value as an SME or VCSE

You don't need a national reach or a massive budget to provide meaningful social value. Many smaller organisations are already doing great work. Some examples include:

- hiring locally or offering apprenticeships
- reducing waste or using sustainable materials
- partnering with local charities or schools
- supporting diversity through inclusive recruitment

Tip: Social value at the MOJ

The MOJ's priorities may include reducing reoffending, supporting disadvantaged groups or delivering upskilling opportunities. Identify the objectives of your buyer when deciding on your social value commitments.

Procure: Bidding and delivering

Sourcing

When starting a procurement, buyers usually submit a notice on the central platform, [Find a Tender Service](#) (FTS). This notice will typically include details on the scope and specification of the requirement, as well as the evaluation criteria - how bids will be assessed.

Some contracts, however, are awarded through framework agreements. In these cases, opportunities may not be advertised publicly on FTS. Instead, buyers will contact suppliers that are already listed on the framework directly.

How to submit a bid

At the MOJ, suppliers usually submit bids via our eSourcing portal, [Jaggaer](#). Make sure you:

- log in early and register your interest
- attach all required documents
- submit by the deadline - late bids may be disqualified

Tips: Submitting bids as SMEs/VCSEs

1. Read everything carefully - Check all the documentation you upload and ensure you comply with instructions on format, deadline and submission method.
2. Answer what is being asked - Consider structuring your response with headings matching the question(s).
3. Consider the 'how' - When asked 'how', avoid the common pitfall of answering with 'what'. For example, how you will work with charities is different from what charities you will work with.
4. Include all information, every time - Buyers cannot cross-reference bids from other procurements. Ensure all relevant information is included in every bid you submit.
5. Ask questions - Submit any questions you may have on [Jaggaer](#).



Evaluating and assessing bids

Bids are assessed using the criteria published on Find a Tender Service. Common assessment criteria include:



**Technical
capability**



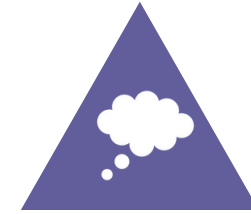
Price



**Social
value**



**Delivery
plans**



Innovation

How to improve your bid

- Try to stand out - Clearly state what makes you unique, whether it's niche skills, community insight or tailored social value.
- Keep it evidence-based - Include results, references or case studies. Even small examples can carry weight.
- Ask questions - Use [Jaggaer](#) to ask any questions during the tender process. Be concise and focused with your questions.
- Social value counts - Think about how your proposal adds social, economic or environmental benefits.

Tip: Learn from the process

Even if you don't win a contract, engaging with the process builds your profile and experience for future opportunities.



Contract award and mobilisation

After evaluating all bids, the MOJ will notify bidders of the outcome. You will generally receive feedback, even if you are unsuccessful in being awarded the contract. If you don't automatically receive feedback, consider submitting a request through our eSourcing platform [Jaggaer](#). This will help you improve future bids for other contracts.

Once a contract is awarded, the successful supplier will enter the mobilisation phase. This may include:

- finalising legal terms and signing the contract
- meeting the MOJ contract manager or delivery team
- setting up performance measures (known as Key Performance Indicators or KPIs)
- agreeing communication channels, reporting and payment schedules

Payment terms

Under the Procurement Act 2023, many public buyers, including the MOJ, must accept electronic invoices and pay all undisputed invoices within 30 days of receipt.

Suppliers who are awarded high-value contracts are often required to pay 95% of invoices within 60 days and maintain an average payment time of 45 days or less.

What this mean for SMEs and VCSEs:



**More predictable
cash flow**



**Fewer disputes
over late
payments**



**Further
protections in
the supply chain**



Manage: Making your contract work

Contract management

Contract management helps ensure you provide what you promised and maintain a strong relationship with the MOJ.

Once your contract starts, you'll likely work with a contract manager from the MOJ who will keep in touch, check on progress and make sure the contract is being delivered as agreed.

You'll usually be expected to:

- meet agreed timelines, standards and performance measures
- report on your progress and share updates
- work through any issues that arise during delivery

SMEs and VCSEs often succeed when they:



Appoint a named person to lead the contract



Keep a record of what's delivered and when



Seek clarification early if something is unclear

Tip: Build your relationship

Treat your contract manager as a partner. Keep communication open, be proactive about challenges and don't wait for formal meetings to flag issues.



Modifications

Sometimes, a contract may need to change after it has started. This is called a modification (or a variation under the old regulations - see section '[New and old regulations](#)' for more details).

Modifications are subject to strict legal rules, especially for higher-value contracts. Therefore, informal agreements are insufficient, and the appropriate procedures must be followed.

What does this mean for SMEs and VCSEs?

- Don't make changes without formal agreement
- Speak to the contract manager if you think a change may be needed
- Be aware some changes must be published publicly before they take effect

Extensions

Some contracts include options to extend the agreement. You will know upfront if a contract can be extended, as it will be written into the original agreement.

Tip: Understanding extensions

Contract extensions may seem unusual. For example, "3 + 1 + 1" is a common type of extension. This is a three-year contract with the option to add two extra years, one at a time. This type of extensions allows flexibility for both the supplier and the buyer.

Contract exit

Eventually, every contract comes to an end. Before this, there is usually a contract exit process. During this process, you may be expected to:

- provide a final report or review
- return any equipment or data
- support a handover to another organisation

Further Support

MOJ SME and VCSE Action Plan

The MOJ, along with several other government departments, has published an [SME and VCSE Action Plan](#).

This sets out how we plan to increase opportunities for smaller suppliers, reduce barriers and do more business with organisations like yours.

SME and VCSE Crown Representatives

The SME and VCSE Crown Representatives work across government to champion the interests of small and voluntary organisations in public procurement. They advise on how to better engage with SMEs and VCSEs and promote the unique strengths of these organisations.

[Meet the SME Crown Rep – Shirley Cooper OBE](#)

[Meet the VCSE Crown Rep – Claire Dove CBE](#)

Further tools and resources

The [VCSE Business Hub](#), developed by the VCSE Crown Rep and hosted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), brings together helpful tools, case studies and guidance specifically for VCSEs interested in supplying to government.

The [Cabinet Office Small Business Advisory Panel](#) helps the government identify and remove barriers faced by SMEs in public sector procurement.

[Clinks](#) supports and advocates for the voluntary sector working in criminal justice. Clinks provides training, resources, [newsletters](#) and support for VCSEs to create a more vibrant, independent and resilient voluntary sector.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. I'm an SME/VCSE. Can I really win an MOJ contract?

Yes. Many public contracts are designed to be accessible to SMEs and VCSEs. At the MOJ, direct spend with smaller suppliers currently accounts for around 21% of total procurement spend. Additionally, the government has made it a priority to open up more opportunities to smaller suppliers, including by dividing contracts into smaller lots, improving payment terms and reducing unnecessary barriers.

2. Where do I find MOJ contract or grant opportunities?

Many MOJ opportunities are published on [Find a Tender Service](#) (FTS). You can search by keyword, location, value and more, and sign up for email alerts. Find out more about FTS in the '[Registering as a supplier](#)' section above. Most of our contracts are awarded through frameworks. Find out more in the '[Frameworks](#)' section above. Grant opportunities are published on [Find a Grant](#).

3. How do I register to bid for MOJ opportunities?

Start by creating an account on [Jaggaer](#), our eSourcing platform, and [FTS](#). Some contracts can also be accessed through frameworks, like those run by the [Crown Commercial Service](#). Find out more about FTS and Jaggaer in the '[Registering as a supplier](#)' section above.



4. What is a ‘lot’ and how do I know if it’s right for me?

A lot is a smaller part of a larger contract. Government buyers are encouraged to divide contracts into lots to make them more accessible. You can choose to bid for just one lot that fits your capability, or several. Look for lot details in the contract notice or tender documents. Lots can be found on [Find a Tender Service](#). Find out more about lots in the [‘Lotting’](#) section above.

5. What is ‘social value’ and how can I provide it?

Social value is the wider benefit your organisation brings, such as creating jobs, supporting disadvantaged groups or reducing environmental impact in addition to the core requirements of the contract. You’ll need to describe how your work supports the specific outcomes that have been selected from the government’s [Social Value Model](#). SMEs and VCSEs often already do some of this – it is important to show new commitments aligned with the Social Value Model policy objectives and demonstrate this clearly in your bid. Find out more about Social Value in the [‘Social Value in public procurement’](#) section above.

6. How long does it take to get paid?

Under the Procurement Act 2023, contracting authorities like the MOJ are required to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days of receipt. If you are a subcontractor for a larger supplier, they are often required to pay their invoices within 60 days, with faster payment targets being phased in. Find out more in the [‘Payment terms’](#) section above.



7. What support is available for SMEs and VCSEs?

There is a wide range of support available:

- the [SME Crown Representative](#) and [VCSE Crown Representative](#) advocate for your interests across government
- the [VCSE Hub](#) and [CCS Procurement Essentials](#) offer guides, checklists and training
- [Clinks](#) provide support for voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice
- you can also attend engagement events to learn more

8. What policy and rules must public sector procurement follow?

Public procurement, including contracts awarded by the MOJ, is governed by a framework of laws, regulations and policies designed to ensure transparency, fairness and value for money.

To support the legislation, the Cabinet Office regularly publishes [Procurement Policy Notes](#) (PPNs). These set out mandatory rules, best practice or guidance for how public bodies should run procurements.

Note: '[PPN 001: SME and VCSE procurement spend targets](#)' sets out the government requirement for all central departments (like the MOJ) to set and publish formal targets for how much they plan to spend directly with SMEs and VCSEs.



9. Where can I raise concerns about public procurement practice?

The [Public Procurement Review Service](#) sits within Cabinet Office and allows government suppliers and potential government suppliers to raise concerns anonymously about potential poor public sector procurement practice.

10. Who can I contact for help with Crown Commercial Services (CCS) procurement processes?

If you are engaging with CCS frameworks, the CCS helpdesk provides support for suppliers and public sector buyers. You can reach them at info@crowncommercial.gov.uk or call 0345 410 2222. Find out about CCS frameworks in the [CCS framework agreements](#) section above.

11. How are dynamic markets different from a Dynamic Purchasing System?

A [Dynamic market](#) (DM) is a list of qualified suppliers (i.e., suppliers who have met the conditions for membership of the dynamic market) who are eligible to participate in future procurements. The DM replaces [Dynamic Purchasing System](#) (DPS) under the Procurement Act 2023. DPSs are limited to providing commonly purchased products under the Public Contract Regulations 2015. In comparison, DMs can be set up for procurement of all kinds of goods, services or works. Procurement carried out under a DM must meet the minimum contract threshold for each type of contract. See also the section on Commercial Tools above.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this guidance document.

If you have any questions about this guide or would like to request a large print, plain text or Welsh language version of this document, please get in touch with MOJ Commercial at SME-Enquiries@justice.gov.uk