

## Procurement policy may not be sexy, but if we want corr...

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Procurement sounds almost as exciting as accounting to most people. And as a chartered accountant I am certain that people are wrong about the importance of good accounting if we are to have the controls in place to make any organisation work, including government. In the same way I am as sure that transparent, open and accountable procurement policy is vital if three things are to happen.

The first is that government is to buy well.

The second is that it can be ensured that government purchasing is free of corruption,

The third is that there are mechanisms in place to hold the government to account for the purchasing decisions it does make.

In that case the government's [announcement on new post-Brexit procurement policy](#) yesterday was important, however unexciting some people might think this issue.

And there are problems. The Fair Tax Mark, which I co-founded and still advise, has spent a lot of time working in this issue because of the importance of keeping tax cheats out of the government supply system. They published a Twitter thread on the issue last night:

<https://twitter.com/fairtaxmark/status/1339282220306079747?s=21>

They raise a number of concerns. In particular, that whilst steps to block companies from the supply chain if they do not have identifiable beneficial ownership are welcome, they then note that:

*the clauses on toughening up the exclusion of businesses displaying poor tax conduct are weak in the extreme. Nothing at all on tax avoiders. And a vague commitment to look at exclusion of tax evaders. Which, to be candid, is a no-brainer.*

And they add:

*So, you may ask, why the difference in approach. Well, some of it definitely relates to the EU Procurement Directive, which is not helpful in the area of tax. But the "Procurement Transformation Advisory Panel" has obviously had a big influence.*

And who is on that? They note:

*This is a group that includes.... Amazon..... [and which ] refuses to disclose its terms of reference or the minutes of meetings.*

What chance of objectivity on tax in that case?

Worrying as this is, and welcome as the Fair Tax Mark's commitment to making a submission to the consultation on this issue also is, another dimension has emerged from [The Good Law Project](#), who are bringing a number of legal actions against the government regarding its cronyism on PPE contracts. As they have noted:

*The Government's [position](#) in the litigation we are bringing is that no one would have the right to bring a public interest challenge to it giving contracts worth hundreds of millions — or more — to its mates. And that only disaffected bidders can bring challenges. If that's right — and we don't yet know — then there is only one class of potential challenger, failed bidders.*

Their belief seems to be that this review of policy is intended to reinforce this claim. If so, and given the costs of bringing the cases, the chance of preventing corruption within procurement processes at the behest of ministers themselves is essentially removed by this new policy. In other words, a platform for corruption is created by removing the opportunity to object to what is happening.

So tax cheats and corrupt ministers and their mates are to have a field day. Was that what 'bringing back control' was meant to mean? Some always thought so. It seems they may well have been right. I was not convinced at the time, I thought that there was still some integrity in Tory politics. Now, I am not at all sure that there is. The kleptocracy is coming.