

Transparency, transparency, where art thou?



"I can't find the way to public accountability".

On 7th December 2022, we submitted a Freedom of Information request to the DHSC seeking detailed information about commercial supply contracts for Covid-19 PPE on the Isle of Man.

By a reply letter dated 23rd December 2022 titled "***Response not required***", the Department declined to provide any substantive answers.

Remarkably, the Department even suggested that IOM companies provided PPE "*at cost with no fees charged*".

Quite frankly, we regard the Department's glib and complacent response as utterly disgraceful.

There is a clear context to our reasonable questions given that the UK Government was sharply criticised by the **National Audit Office** (NAO) in 2022 for writing off an astronomical £9 billion on unusable or overpriced Covid PPE. Tonnes of items such as masks, gowns and gloves were way overpriced, substandard, defective or unusable.



“Relax, don’t worry about the cost, they’re great for cleaning teeth!”

The NAO calculated that of that £9 billion, a shocking £4.7 billion had been paid out through over inflated prices (significant profits made by UK companies or their corporate intermediaries and through increased prices).

In addition, the **Good Law Project** won a significant Court action in January 2022 to the effect that the UK Government’s fast-track “VIP lane”, giving politically affiliated companies commercial priority, was unlawful.

Moreover, the **National Crime Agency** is currently investigating a number of very serious allegations of fraud and political corruption linked to the supply of Covid PPE in the UK.



Headquarters of National Crime Agency, Tinworth Street, London.

Plainly, therefore, our Freedom of Information questions such as which companies supplied PPE to the Manx Government, how much was each company paid, what was the tendering process, were standard procurement processes applied and due diligence carried out, are pertinent, in the public interest and entirely legitimate.

In this regard, we refer to a statement made in *Tynwald*, the Manx Parliament, by Mr Alfred Cannan, the Isle of Man Chief Minister, on 17th May 2022.

This Parliamentary statement was in response to the findings of an Employment Tribunal in the case of Dr R. Ranson.

Mr Cannan laudably talked about reforming the culture and ethos of public services, with the highest standards of accountability, integrity and openness being necessary.

The Chief Minister stated, "*Government is too big and unwieldy. Operations must now be annexed into the appropriate structures to bring about proper governance and transparency*".

Regrettably, in light of the DHSC's contemptible response to our Freedom of Information requests, those comments could properly be regarded as laughably hollow.

Perhaps it will take a criminal investigation by the IOM Constabulary or an international media exposé into conflict of interests, profiteering and vested interests or perhaps a financial inquiry by the *Public Accounts Committee* of Tynwald to unearth the full answers we seek, and to which the Manx taxpayer has a fundamental right to know. DHSC- watch this space.

See the response from DHSC dated 23rd December 2022 on our FOI page.