

Sixty-sixth report of Session 2022-23

Department of Health and Social Care

PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic

Introduction from the Committee

As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Department of Health and Social Care ('The Department') needed to purchase a huge amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) very quickly. In the year 2020–21, it spent over £12 billion on PPE through what this Committee has previously found to be a "haphazard purchasing strategy"¹ including a series of contracts let with unproven, newly created, companies. The Department's approach to contracting for PPE was rushed and outside the usual procurement route. This led to many risky contracts. The result was some £9 billion written off, including £4 billion of PPE that cannot be used in the NHS.

Because there was no national centralised model for procuring and allocating PPE to the health and social care sectors that needed it at the time, the Department established a parallel supply chain and a 'High Priority Lane' (known generally as the 'VIP' lane). This allowed referrals of potential suppliers from MPs, Peers, ministers, and senior officials. Later, in January 2022, the High Court ruled that the use of the High Priority Lane was unlawful.

PPE Medpro was one of the private companies awarded valuable contracts having been referred through this High Priority Lane by Baroness Michelle Mone. PPE Medpro was set up on 12 May 2020. It was awarded its first contract, worth £81 million, a month later on 12 June to supply 210 million face masks. The Department awarded a second contract a couple of weeks later on 26 June, worth £122 million for sterile surgical gowns.

In January 2022, the House of Lords Commissioners for Standards announced that Baroness Mone was subject to an inquiry relating to her alleged involvement in procuring contracts for PPE Medpro leading to potential breaches of the House of Lords Code of Conduct. That investigation is currently on hold while related matters are the subject of criminal investigation by the National Crime Agency. It was announced that Baroness Mone would be taking a leave of absence from the House of Lords on 6 December 2022.

On 6 December 2022, the House of Commons debated and agreed that all papers, advice and correspondence involving Ministers and Special Advisers relating to contracts for PPE awarded to PPE Medpro by the Department should be released to the Public Accounts Committee.

On 19 December 2022 the Government commenced legal proceedings against PPE Medpro on the second contract, worth £122 million for the supply of gowns. The Department has stated that it does not believe that these gowns were fit for use. This is a claim that PPE Medpro deny. Baroness Mone has publicly denied involvement with PPE Medpro.

Based on the information shared by the Department of Health and Social Care, the Committee published its report on 18 July 2023. This is the government's response to the Committee's report.

Relevant reports

- PAC report: [PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 1590)
- [Department of Health and Social Care 2020-21 Annual Report and Accounts](#) (HC 1053)
- [Department of Health and Social Care 2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts](#) (HC 1043)

Government response to the Committee

The government notes the Committee's report.