

## Can a leopard ever change its spots? Or a poodle its perm?

Prime Minister David Cameron has written to ministers requesting all public sector contracts worth over £500 are posted on the internet by January 2011, starting with IT contracts next month. The Treasury has just published the list of public sector projects that are to be cancelled or suspended. It appears that our new government is serious about changing what the public sector does and how it spends money.

And change it must. Many IT contractors, and engineering and other types of contractors, too, for that matter, work for end-user clients that view the public sector as a license to print money. Many contractors working directly for the public sector see suppliers doing just that all the time. This is particularly prevalent in public sector IT, as freelance marketplace [PeoplePerHour.com](#) highlighted in a [recent report](#) about town hall website spend.

IT contractors currently working on public sector IT programmes frequently tell ContractorCalculator about the shocking waste they witness. Some deliberately move away from cushy public sector clients because they feel working in a non-commercial environment means they lose their edge, which could impact on their future contract prospects.

One recent story told to me by an IT contractor highlights how it will take more than just words from the new government to change an entire culture that has become wasteful and often self-serving. The IT contractor in question was working on a three-month contract for a public sector organisation. Being the skilled professional that she is, she suggested a minor improvement to a system that would automatically generate a particular report and deliver it to the email inbox of the relevant departmental heads. The contractor's client project manager was horrified, and instructed the contractor not undertake the improvement. On asking the client why, she was told: "Betty manually generates and circulates the report. If that's automated, then Betty has nothing to do."

This particular public sector client is by no means alone. I am told variations of this story repeatedly, and IT improvements that could vastly increase efficiency in public sector organisations are frequently rejected by public sector managers to safeguard a 'make-work' job. The private sector is a long way from being perfect, but in a commercial organisation, when efficiency gains are made, it's generally the headcount that gets cut because people are expensive. How is our government going to achieve the efficiency gains required to maintain frontline services whilst cutting costs, when they're facing a culture that actively acts against productivity improvements to keep people in work?

Let's hope that Messrs Cameron, Clegg and Osborne can un-perm our public sector poodles, unleashing the leopards within that can rid us of the rip-off, make-work culture that gives public servants an all-too-often unjustified bad name.

	<p><b>Dave Chaplin</b> CEO ContractorCalculator</p>		<p><a href="#">View all our commentators</a> ▶</p>	<p>Dave Chaplin is a former IT contractor in the City of London, and is founder and CEO of ContractorCalculator, and author of the Contractors' Handbook.</p>
<p><i>Market Commentator</i></p>				<p>Started in 1999, ContractorCalculator (this site) is the leading independent website for the UK contracting industry – most of whom are highly skilled knowledge workers.</p>
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