


UK falls to lowest position for corruption – so what's going wrong?

14 February 2024  Paul Wainwright

The stark reality of the UK's fall from grace on the world stage can be summed up in the recent publication of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by Transparency International (TI) for 2023 where it fell from its ranking of 11th to 18th in a single year.

The UK joins only 4 other countries to have dropped more than 5 places in the 180 country world league of perceived levels of corruption in the public sector – Qatar, Myanmar, Azerbaijan, and Oman.

The score is based on data from 8 independent sources from surveys including the World Economic Forum, from experts and business leaders with their views on abuse of public office for private gain and bribery in the UK.

The watchwords are integrity and accountability and on the evidence of the current Index, the business community has given a unanimous thumbs down to recent standards of UK leadership and government.

There are a number of key themes which appear to encourage corruption:

- AML compliance - Even though lawyers are professionally mandated to act as gatekeepers in respect of money laundering corruption cases analysed by TI showed that compliance in cross border matters was an issue;
- Financial secrecy - The recently created Register of Foreign entities which identifies high value real estate owners fails to identify the ultimate (beneficial) owners – a gap which undermines confidence and trust.
- Abuse of power – public procurement during Covid was facilitated by a suspension of safeguards designed to prevent corruption – and TI's research has found that:
 1. 98.9% of public contracts were awarded without any form of competition
 2. 20% of Covid 19 contracts (equivalent to £3.7bn) raised one or more flags for possible corruption
 3. The VIP Fastlane PPE procedures showed evidence consistent with systematic bias towards connections to the party of Government – despite denials.
 4. Companies without any record of supplying goods and services prior to 2020 benefited to the tune of £620m.
 5. Significant donors to the Conservative party being elevated to the House of Lords

Failure to enforce the rule of law, be consistent in its controls of the public purse to ensure accountability and transparency, and safeguarding taxpayers' money have all fuelled the drop in perceived standards, which TI state are now being noticed on the world stage.

TI and public calls for a restoration of ethics in politics, a commitment to accountability and transparency and above all safeguarding taxpayers' money would be a start on the road to recovery. There is also an increasing clamour to scrutinise and recover public money lost to fraud and error for Covid-19 schemes such estimated to be between £3.3-7.3bn as well as review of the unlawful VIP Fastlane contracts estimated to be worth £14bn. This would go some way to increasing business confidence and elevating the UKs position as a good place to do business.



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