

Case Study: An Innovative Procurement Strategy to Embed Circularity in Swansea Council's Civic Centre Office Refurbishment



Summary

During 2017 the City and County of Swansea Council (CCoS) embarked upon an agile working programme that will eventually move 1,400 employees based in the Swansea Civic Centre from traditional individual offices and desk allocation to a flexible working environment. This case study is based on the transition towards agile working, and the refurbishment of three wings of the Civic Centre that has been completed to date.

As part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA) and corporate social responsibility as a council, CCoS explored innovative ways to re-use and refurbish their existing furniture to create a new office environment. To achieve this CCoS adopted a novel approach to procuring furnishings and flooring. Tender specifications outlined ambitious requirements for existing furniture and flooring to be re-used, refurbished and incorporated into the new layout.

CCoS have proved how embedding sustainable procurement in their office refit can be embraced by staff members, providing inspiration for replication in the future. Working with local Supported Businesses has also helped CCoS to demonstrate collaboration, which is a highlighted theme set out in the WFGA.

Key Facts

- Agile working practices have reduced the need for space by approximately 25%. This has enabled surplus space to be rented to other tenants, creating a new revenue stream for CCoS.
- Originally, 122 staff worked from 150 desks. Now, 368 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees work from 212 desks, doubling the desk utilisation rate from 0.81 to 1.74.
- 486 items of furniture have been re-used or remanufactured. This has diverted approximately 7.8 tonnes from landfill, and has resulted in a total CO₂e saving of 29.1 tonnes.
- 1,213m² of floorspace was carpeted, with re-used carpet tiles accounting for 530m² (44% of total floorspace). This has reduced waste-to-landfill or incineration by 2.39 tonnes, and resulted in a CO₂e saving of 4.5 tonnes
- Sourcing remanufactured furniture and re-used carpet has enabled the procurement to create six new FTE positions and three temporary roles.

Context

CCoS plan to move offices within the next four years and have recognised the need to transition towards workplace practices that will suit a more agile workforce in the new building. A timeline was developed to conduct an initial pilot (Phase 1) – based on a specific working area – to showcase the approach and help to create internal buy-in for the new workspace format. This was then followed by roll-out across one floor of the Civic Centre (Phase 2) and then across the whole building (Phase 3).



The refurbishment of the Civic Centre provided an opportunity to create an open-plan style with furniture designed to facilitate the new working practices. To assist the design, CCoS defined five specific work areas and functions:

- ‘Collaboration’: Areas where people can meet and plan
- ‘Focus’: Space for individual, concentrated work
- ‘Socialisation’: Informal areas where people can connect and hold informal meetings
- ‘Supervision’: Space to assist in staff development e.g. training resources, quiet spaces for confidential meetings
- ‘Touch down’: Short stay areas for staff members who are only in the building for short periods.

CCoS also wanted to expand their existing options for disposing of surplus and redundant furniture which prioritises:

1. Partner organisations, e.g. schools;
2. All other council organisations;
3. Other CCoS departments;
4. Neighbouring authorities and colleges;
5. Local charities;
6. Recycling through ‘Recycle Shop’, Swansea.

Tender Process

To date, three wings of the Civic Centre have gone through the transformation into modern agile-style workspaces, covering a total area of 1,200m². Work was carried out over three phases since April 2017. The pilot procurement (Phase 1) started in January 2017, with installation in April 2017. Phases 2 and 3 were tendered in May 2017, with installation from July 2017.

The tenders specified a minimum requirement of 80% of the furniture *“to be either upcycled or recycled and include items from the existing office furniture held by CCoS”*.

“The Well-being of Future Generations goals are core to Swansea Council’s asset management. Upcycling and recycling furniture in partnership with local social enterprises has helped demonstrate our corporate objectives in a visible and tangible way as we modernise the way we work through a more agile working environment.”

Rebecca Jones,
Civic Buildings and Accommodation Manager,
Corporate Building & Property Services, Swansea
City Council

The remaining 20% of furniture could be *“new or recycled items as long as they contributed to the modern feel of the office environment and supported the new agile working environment”*.

CCoS used the National Procurement Service Wales (NPS) Furniture Framework for Supported Businesses of which Ministry of Furniture is currently the sole supplier.



Furniture

Across all three phases a total of 486 items of furniture were re-used or remanufactured. This includes:

- 199 desks
- 214 office chairs
- 41 storage units
- 2 tables
- 3 meeting pods
- 25 other items

Re-using and remanufacturing the above items has diverted approximately 7.8 tonnes from landfill. This also achieved a total CO₂e saving of 29.1 tonnes:

- Savings from desks and tables is approximately 13.9 tonnes CO₂e
- Savings from office chairs is approximately 12.6 tonnes CO₂e
- Savings from storage units and other items is approximately 2.6 tonnes CO₂e

Each remanufactured office chair used in the project has an estimated associated 20kg of carbon dioxide emissions. This equates to a 61%

reduction when compared to emissions from equivalent new chairs.¹ Water consumption associated with the remanufacture of the chairs (1,424 litres) also compares favourably when compared to new chairs (5,114 litres). This equates to a 72% saving in water consumption.

Desks were re-engineered and remanufactured into a beam desk system using legacy stock from CCoS. Ministry of Furniture calculated that dismantling 70 desks for re-use on site enabled them to reduce lorry movements by 77% (from 13 to three vehicle loads).

Landscape furniture and soft seating were sourced and refurbished from nearly-new and ex-showroom stock, helping to achieve cost savings.

Re-use contracts have enabled Ministry of Furniture to create four new FTE positions and three temporary roles for people furthest from the job market.

Flooring



Greenstream were appointed to replace existing carpets – which were in poor condition after long-term extended use – for recycling and re-use.

Across all three phases, a total floorspace of 1,213m² was carpeted. Re-used carpet tiles accounted for 530m², equivalent to 44% of the total floorspace.

Re-using 530 m² of carpet tiles enabled CCoS to reduce waste-to-landfill or incineration by 2.39

tonnes.² This also achieved a CO₂e saving of 4.5 tonnes.

The contract with CCoS has helped Greenstream to secure the employment and apprenticeship training of two previously long-term unemployed individuals.

Meet the Suppliers

Greenstream Flooring – A third sector organisation that provided flooring solutions for this project. Their mission is to maximise the community benefit of the re-use and sales of flooring.

As a social enterprise, Greenstream's profits are used to support its mission. Thanks to CCoS and Public Health Wales, Greenstream's circular flooring service is now able to support more people with learning difficulties towards employment and provide more free carpet to low income social housing tenants in Wales.

"The Estates team at Swansea Council have shown real leadership in seeking out solutions for their office refurbishment that deliver the Well-being of Future Generations goals. As well as re-using furniture and flooring, and reducing waste, they have also engaged with social enterprises at scale that demonstrates the potential for other public sector bodies to deliver similar benefits."

Ellen Petts,
MD, Greenstream Flooring CIC

Ministry of Furniture – A Supported Business and full member of Social Firms Wales.

In January 2017, they entered into an arrangement with Wales-based office furniture solutions business, Orangebox, to source local furniture for re-use and remanufacture.

"Our work with Swansea Council has been rewarding and pioneering. In going for a remanufactured and used approved solution to the Civic projects, Swansea Council have demonstrated their commitment to the circular economy, whilst at the same time supporting Ministry of Furniture – a Welsh business with social aims. We're proud and delighted to be associated with them."

Simon Jones
Business Manager, Ministry of Furniture

One product stream – used in the CCoS project - involves taking used Orangebox G64 task chairs, servicing them, replacing any worn components, and providing a like-new chair with a five-year guarantee.

Innovative Procurement Helped to Deliver Aims

Sustainable procurement in the public sector should prioritise and demonstrate transparency, fairness, non-discrimination, competition, accountability, and verification. This aligns closely with the Welsh Government's 'Well-being Goals' of contributing towards a more equal, resilient and globally responsible Wales (as outlined in the WFGA).

CCoS have an existing responsible disposal policy for furniture. However, the office refit provided an opportunity to achieve wider Well-being Goals by creating employment and skills opportunities for Supported Businesses in Wales through furniture refurbishment. The circular procurement approach also helped to close product and material loops, reducing waste to landfill and supporting the re-use and remanufacturing economy.

CCoS set up internal champions for change management (team dynamics and environment) to help in transitioning work practices. CCoS have moved 180 staff to date and have employed a survey to evaluate outcomes. Monitoring is ongoing; however, initial results show that sickness levels have reduced by up to 87% when compared to a similar period in the previous year.



CCoS consulted with staff to help create buy-in for the new agile working practices. Monitoring usage levels also meant that different working areas could be trialled in order to increase efficiency and utilisation.

New agile working practices have reduced space requirements by approximately 25%. Utilisation has been further increased through surplus office space (2,069m²) being rented to Swansea

University School of Management, which has created a new revenue stream for CCoS.

Lessons Learnt

- CCoS will be exploring options to link future supply with ongoing maintenance to increase the circularity and sustainability of their procurement strategy.
- Circular procurement principles will be applied to refurbish the Guild Hall office in Swansea, where there are approximately 900 staff members. If similar savings to this project are achieved, it would divert a further 21 tonnes from landfill and save approximately 78 tonnes of CO₂e.
- More open tendering and testing of market requirements is required if scale is to be built up by CCoS and more widely throughout Wales.
- Forecasting furniture requirements within the Welsh public sector would help clients and suppliers to understand demand, which could potentially encourage more businesses to provide circular furniture solutions, mirroring trends observed in the Netherlands.³
- Warranties on remanufactured goods are an important aspect in building confidence for re-used products with clients. The five-year warranty offered by Ministry of Furniture for remanufactured items in the Swansea Civic Centre project was comparable to that of new products.

Definitions of Terms Used

- **Re-use** - Products or components that are not waste are used again for the same purpose for which they were conceived (i.e. dealing with waste prevention).
- **Refurbishment** - Products that are repaired by a manufacturer or agent and resold. Refurbished products are normally tested for functionality and defects before being sold.⁴
- **Remanufacturing** - The practice of taking end-of-life goods and re-engineering them back to as-new condition, with warranty to match.⁵
- **Recycling** - Any recovery operation by which waste materials are reprocessed into products, materials or substances whether for the original or other purposes.²
- **Supported Businesses** - Supported Businesses provide sustainable employment to people with a disability. To be classed as a Supported Business the organisation must have a workforce where at least 50% of people are disabled.⁶



References

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Interested in finding out more?

If you wish to find out more about this case study example or if you are a public sector organisation that would like to receive support then please get in touch with **WRAP Cymru's Sustainable Resource Management team on 02920 100 100 or Resources.Wales@wrap.org.uk.**

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