

## NWCPO CIRCULAR AND SOCIAL PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PROJECT UPCYCLED AND PRE-LOVED OFFICE FURNITURE FIT-OUT

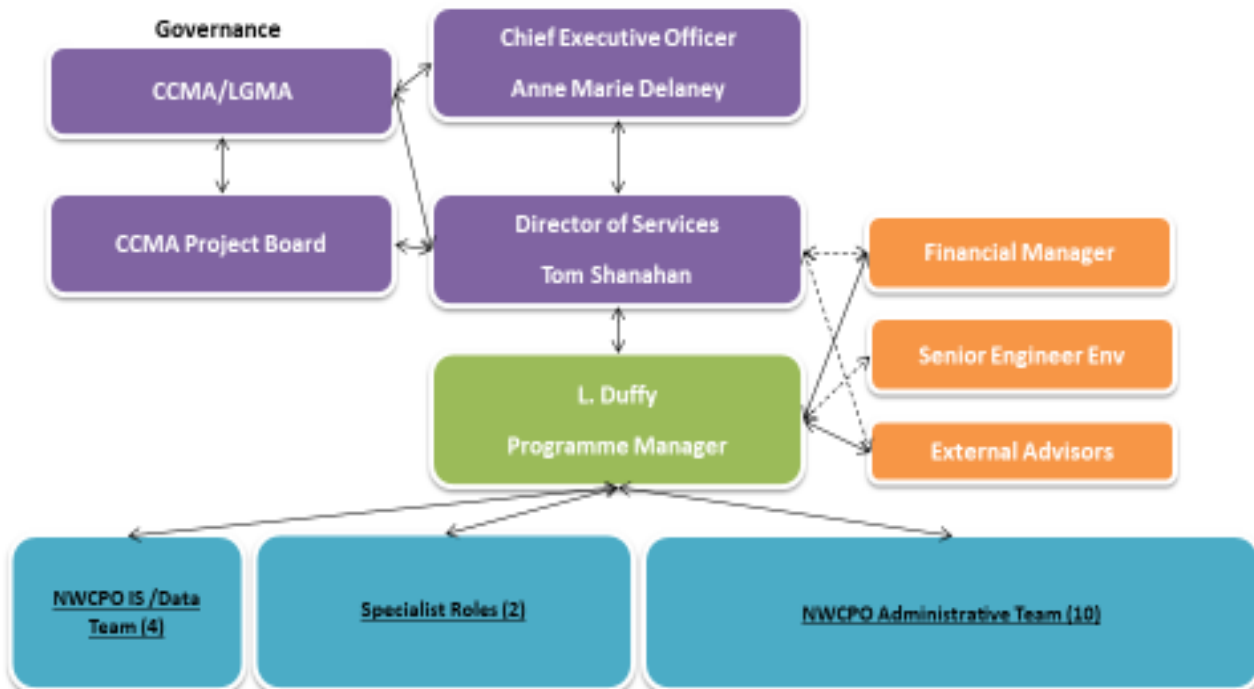
### Project Background

The National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) is a shared service initiative, based in Offaly County Council. The Office commenced operations on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2012 providing a service on behalf of all 31 Local Authorities. The primary function of the NWCPO is the processing of waste collection permit applications but also hosts national waste registers and a significant waste data repository.

There are over 2000 waste collection permits in the republic of Ireland which authorise the collection of a range of waste types including; household kerbside waste, hazardous waste, bulky waste, construction and demolition waste, commercial waste. The application process and waste collection permit conditions put requirements on waste operators to comply with waste legislation, policy and best practice in waste collection and environmental protection.

The NWCPO is governed by Project Board consisting of members from the County and City Managers Association and Local Government Management Agency. The operations of the office are managed under the Environment Directorate in Offaly County Council. The current approved compliment for the NWCPO Team is 17.

#### NWCPO Governance and Team Structure:





National Waste Collection Permit Office

Procurement in Offaly County Council is largely a devolved function, where individual departments including the NWCP are responsible for ensuring their sourcing requirements are met while operating to best procurement practice and compliance with relevant legislative, regulatory and policy requirements. The Procurement Section is based in the Finance Department and the role of the Section under the guidance of the Procurement Officer, Ina Mallin, is to provide co-ordination, support and oversight in respect of procurement activities across the organisation.

Becoming a more Circular Economy requires new approaches to every stage of a product's life - from prevention, design, reuse and repair to refurbishment and recycling. The European revised Waste Framework Directive sets out the ambition to move toward a more Circular Economy, acknowledging this will significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from resource extraction and production as well as creating many new jobs. Being at the top of the waste hierarchy, prevention, reuse and repair are the very heart of the circular economy concept.

Although public procurement is identified a key economic instrument in the Directive, and the benefits of green public procurement are recognised in Ireland's *Climate Action Plan* and *Circular 20/2019: Promoting the use of Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement*, there have been limited examples of procurement projects that prioritise reuse and upcycling to date.

In 2019 the Office was required to move out of the main Offaly County Council building into a new unfurnished office space in Tullamore. As a lead authority in the resources sector, the NWCP sought to contribute to the national effort to promote Green Public Procurement and the circular economy by specifying in the Request for Tender that all furniture for a new office space should be upcycled. The aim was to demonstrate that upcycling at a commercial level could be achieved while creating a unique working environment.

A request for quotation (RFQ) for the delivery, assembly and installation of upcycled furniture for an office space including 16 work stations, two meeting rooms, a canteen, a chill out room, a reception area, and an outdoor seating area was issued in May 2019.

Although small by other project standards, the scale of this RfQ had not been previously demonstrated for upcycled furniture and therefore required a highly flexible approach. The NWCP facilitated suppliers to form partnerships or consortiums in the submission of a group quote. This was essential in facilitating an adequate response to the RfQ. The NWCP were open to a flexible and stepwise installation of furniture reflecting the stepwise move of staff across to the new building. The NWCP had a budget of €20,000 - €25,000, which was scoped through comparison with new furniture.

The consortium response provided an estimate of sourcing and delivery arrangements, costing and images of possible items to be sourced for the project.

The procurement process was managed by Leo Duffy, Manager of the NWCP, Maria Brennan Foynes, Staff Officer and Ina Mallin, Procurement Officer. The execution of the project was managed by Maria Brennan Foynes who is well known in Offaly County Council for having a keen eye for design. The contract was awarded in June 2019 and largely completed in December 2019.



## Execution & Challenges

The RfQ was issued to more than three potential suppliers. The project was awarded to [Community Resources Network Ireland](#), the national umbrella network funded by the EPA to support social reuse, repair and recycling enterprises and to help address key barriers facing the sector (as outlined below). CRNI responded to the RfQ with a consortium of two key suppliers and a project management partner and saw this project as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the potential for its members to deliver quality upcycled goods.

As noted above, the small scale of the second hand sector is a key challenge for projects of this nature. In order to provide the 97 items of furniture making up this project, CRNI identified and worked with more than ten different suppliers. The main suppliers were CRNI members the Rediscovery Centre and Back2New, but goods were also sourced from Recycle IT, Free Trade Ireland, furniture clearances at UCD and Henkel; Second hand Office furniture suppliers Griffin Office Solutions and Aline Office Furniture Ltd; and Adverts (private sale). Coordinating the sourcing and delivery of this project was a joint effort between CRNI, the Rediscovery Centre and NWCPO.



Figure 1: Project consortium kick off meeting



Figure 2: Collecting furniture donation from Henkel

The irregular nature of the second hand sector means that it is not always possible to source goods to an exact specification for all items serving the same function (e.g. office desks, meeting room chairs) to be identical. Therefore, a flexible approach by NWCPO toward the specification of furniture and design was sought by the CRNI consortium response to the RfQ and agreed as a key aspect of this project. To achieve a consistent and high quality overall design, time was dedicated by the consortium upfront and at the back end of the project, in consultation with the NWCPO, to reviewing and managing the design of each space.

Some of the suppliers were unable to directly deliver or quality check the furniture. The clearance, exchange and private sale items (22 items in total) required collection, cleaning and assembly onsite. CRNI and the Rediscovery Centre facilitated this in coordination with NWCPO who provided the yard area of their offices for cleaning and assembly. Without this space a warehouse or additional workshop space would have been required which would have added to the overall costing.

Due to the unfinished nature of the goods delivered for cleaning onsite, there were some negative reactions from staff to the quality of goods delivered. Once cleaned, assembled, repaired and installed any concerns were overcome. However, it was noted that staff buy-in and input should be sought for projects of this nature to understand and manage expectations and identify any key issues.



Figure 3: Cleaning and assembling furniture in NWCPO yard



Figure 4: High quality upcycled rosewood cabinets in board room

Due to factors outlined above and the diverse nature of suppliers, the cost of design, collecting, cleaning, repairing and assembling goods was greater than the overall cost of the goods themselves. Overall the project came in on budget even including some items that were specified to a higher standard than originally anticipated e.g. restored wingback chairs for the lobby area, upcycled rosewood cabinets for the board room. However, this does not include the full-time cost of the NWCPO or CRNI in liaising on and coordinating the project, which was absorbed due to the national importance and pilot nature of the project.

## Innovation

This project is the first public procurement project of this scale in Ireland to support both Circular & Social objectives. Given the limited scale and capacity of the second hand sector in Ireland and the low profile of reuse activities in policy and practice, there have not been any other examples to date of second hand goods being prioritised through public procurement.

By explicitly specifying upcycled furnishings, and through measures taken to accommodate scale and flexibility for suppliers, the procurement process facilitated the sector in providing a consortium response. This both addressed the challenges of scale and more importantly, helped to build the capacity of the reuse sector as a whole to engage in more procurement projects in the future. This will enable the sector to contribute toward national Green Public Procurement and circular economy objectives outlined above.



## Outcomes & Results

The environmental, social and economic benefits of a more circular economy are significant. Firstly, reusing goods reduces consumption, leading to a reduction in raw material extraction, manufacturing and transport. This also avoids the creation of waste and hence the need for waste management. Secondly, the EU acknowledges that prevention and preparation for reuse have potential to impact social and economic benefits ‘including jobs and growth, the investment agenda ... the social agenda and industrial innovation.’

The carbon savings from this project due to sourcing pre-loved and upcycled furniture over new were approximately **2.6 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>**, the equivalent of planting 180 evergreen trees. By working with social enterprises like the Rediscovery Centre and Back2New the project also supported access to jobs and skills for people distant from the labour market.



Figure 5: Upcycled chill out room

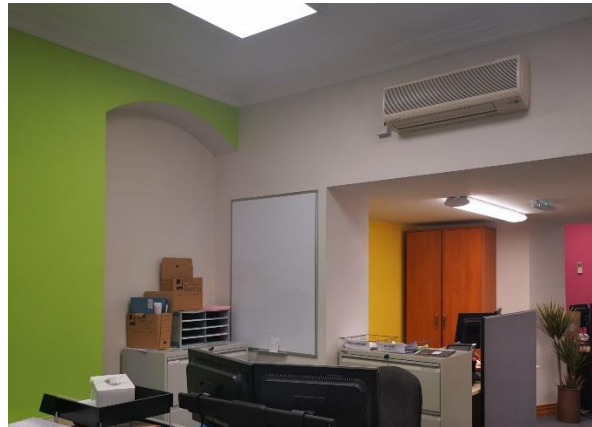


Figure 6: Office space with second hand furniture and recycled paint



Figure 7: Upcycled lobby furniture



Figure 8: Upcycled canteen



Figure 9: Upcycled outdoor seating and washing machine drum planters

As noted above, this case study will be of great importance in promoting Ireland’s circular agenda by demonstrating the feasibility of upcycling at this scale and helping overcome negative attitudes toward and lack of awareness about the quality and availability of second and goods.