



LARAC

Annual Report 2020



LARAC VISION

To be the leading voice for local authorities on recycling, waste and resource management

LARAC MISSION

To influence UK waste policy for the benefit of our members in a manner which advances the waste and resource industry. To provide membership services in a cost effective and quality manner so that our members are well informed. To provide premier local authority national waste conferences that act as a catalyst for information dissemination and promotion of good practice within local authorities.

OUR ORIGINS - OUR STRENGTH

LARAC was founded by and is still run by an Executive of serving local authority recycling and waste management professionals from the whole of the UK. Their experience and working knowledge means they are well placed to represent our members.



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LARAC CHAIR'S REPORT

I think we can safely say that the last year has been a year of two halves. From August to February, we were all going about our work “business as usual”, and then the Covid-19 lockdown hit in March 2020 and life as we knew it changed.

It seems ages since I chaired my second LARAC Conference in October 2019, which was very well attended at our new venue in Birmingham, the Hilton Metropole. Having the majority of attendees under one roof felt such a big improvement and we hoped to return this year. However, we took the tough decision in May to move the event to a virtual one. It was difficult to do that so early on in the pandemic, but the health and safety of everyone was foremost in our thinking.

As I pen this (August 2020), we are not seeing lockdown restrictions fully eased; and in some areas (including my own council area) more restrictions have been implemented to try and quash the rise of positive Covid-19 cases. Scientists and medical experts are saying we will be living with this virus for years to come and so we are adapting to this.

Having completed the first round of Resources and Waste Strategy (RAWS) Consultations last year, the Environment Bill was announced in the Queen’s Speech in October last year. This is the primary legislation that will support the Government’s Environment Plan and RaWS. Unfortunately, its passage through parliament was halted when the Government announced a general election for December. It is still on hold now, as Covid-19 has also affected the timetable.

After my three week whirlwind tour of South America, which I now feel so lucky that I was able to do before the pandemic hit, LARAC started 2020 by representing our members at a number of strategy stakeholder workshops for Consistency, DRS and EPR, in anticipation of the next round of consultations. I went to the local authority bodies’ workshop in February 2020 in London, which turned out to be my last visit to London this year. After a pause of a few months, the stakeholder workshops have now restarted as online meetings, and the consultations are due to be out early next year; a year later than we originally thought.

Despite the delays with the Environment Bill and the consultations, Defra says that the implementation date and changes will still occur in 2023.

Since March, I have been mainly working from home, and like many others, getting to grips with a variety of online meeting softwares. I chaired my first ever webinar in July having postponed our Scotland conference twice. We had three excellent speakers who gave an update on major policy issues affecting Scotland currently: DRS, EPR and the waste management sector in general.

Yes, 2020 has been a strange year so far, but I know that councils are full of dedicated, passionate people who are working hard to keep services going where possible. At the start of the lockdown, and well before any guidance was issued, councils prioritised services, amended risk assessments and communicated changes to the public. The LARAC discussion forum gained a lot of traffic as councils spoke to each other to discuss the changes and how others were dealing with the pandemic. We shared our knowledge and best practice; something else we do well.

It is now August and councils are still reassessing and adapting where needed. However, all this is not sustainable within current budgets and we are spending more to keep services going. I do hope we see the funding needed to support us financially through these times.

I will continue to guide LARAC (from home) and ensure the local authority voice is heard loud and strong. I would like to thank Jenny and Lee, at LARAC HQ, for supporting me over the last year as Chair as well as all the valuable work they do behind the scenes for LARAC, even more so this year.



VICE-CHAIRS' REPORTS

Durk Reyner

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

The cancellation of the 2020 conference is a disappointment, but, clearly necessary. However, in the age of digitisation the 26th conference will still go ahead; though sadly without the physical meeting up of recycling colleagues from across the UK.

This year, the demands on LARAC have been two-fold, in what has been a most demanding last few months due to Covid 19, but, also the Waste Strategy. Lee, Jenny, Carole and many other officers on the LARAC Executive have juggled their busy work demands with national demand. Without everyone's endeavours, LARAC would not have in my opinion, lead the way in responding to all Defra's questions and attended key Defra meetings (Teams and Zoom), regarding Covid. This work went on alongside The Waste Strategy, and Executive officers have helped LARAC produce well-argued feedback on the many ongoing Resources and Waste Strategy consultations (RaWS).

With your continued help and membership support, LARAC will continue to promote local government as one of the leaders in sustainable waste management and address the pressing concerns of climate change. The ability for LARAC to state with confidence that it represents a significant majority of councils across the United Kingdom; reinforces our position that we are the voice of recycling.

Dan Roberts

South Staffordshire Council

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and despite the subsequent legislative delays that have understandably arisen, LARAC has continued to work on behalf of members to help shape policy that we hope will provide the bedrock to enable our services to thrive.

The level of our engagement with Government has stepped up again as we put forward the challenges that our members face but also the opportunities that we see as instrumental to delivering on the bold vision set out in the Resources and Waste Strategy.

This engagement cuts across the whole resource sector and covers a range of topics as LARAC challenges fairly and objectively the information and data presented to us and feeds into the many workshops and meetings ahead of the next round of consultations currently expected in early 2021.

A strengthening of the extended producer responsibility regime offers perhaps a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that we focus on the upper levels of the waste hierarchy and ensure that funding and structures are aligned accordingly.

John Coates

Lincolnshire County Council

Since being elected in April this year, I have become involved in the work that LARAC undertakes with Government, mainly Defra, and other major stakeholders in our sector. This is a very interesting side of LARAC to experience first-hand and it is great to see how close we are to the policy making process from a collaborative perspective.

Taking over from Dan was a high bar to follow but I feel I have got up to speed and am representing LARAC to the best of my ability and fighting our corner. It was great to see how the Exec worked hard to produce updates and advice for our members during the start of the Covid pandemic and lockdown, and worked with NAWDO and ADEPT to develop and publish the weekly services position survey.

I also began posting on LinkedIn to further spread the LARAC message and completed my first two ever blogs for LARAC Online. Didn't realise there were new skill sets I'd have to develop when I took on the vice-chair role! I am looking forward to whatever is in the second RaWS consultations and working hard to make sure local government and LARAC members get the best outcome we can.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The accounts for 2019/20 have been prepared and verified by Thorne and Co and are shown on the following page. The Executive had set a slight deficit budget for the year of £3,500. Expenditure was set to increase slightly on the previous year, but income was forecast to be at the same level as the previous year.

The move to a new conference venue in 2019 made forecasting income more difficult than before. Membership levels had also been difficult to forecast as budget cuts continued to impact on things such as subscriptions and training.

The final year position was significantly different from the budget forecast and resulted in LARAC achieving a £48,000 surplus for the year.

Expenditure was around £9,000 below forecast. This was due in large part to the decision to cease production of the Loop, something that had not been planned at the start of the financial year. Most other aspects of LARAC's operation were close to budgeted expenditure.

Income was significantly higher than had been budgeted. The Scotland LARAC Conference performed well again and income from this was higher than predicted. Membership income also performed well and was higher than forecast as we managed to maintain membership levels despite the small increase in membership fee. But, the biggest increase in income was from the UK Conference. Moving to a new venue had caused us to be cautious in predicting the costs and income associated with holding the event. In the end the costs were broadly similar to previous years, but the income increased significantly, mainly as a result of the greater number of sponsors and exhibitors the new venue could hold.

This bodes well for future years and means that in normal times LARAC could look at how this increased income could be used to bolster the resources of the organisation and improve and increase services to members, and importantly increase the effectiveness of our policy work. With the current Covid-19 situation, possible future plans in that respect have had to be put on hold for a year and we will need to see how LARAC's finances are impacted in 2020/21 before we can look at those again.

This surplus has obviously come at a very fortuitous time for LARAC and will help see us through the current financial year and mean that the organisation is largely protected against the financial impacts of Covid-19.

Going forward for 2020/21 setting any sort of budget has proved complicated with the advent of the pandemic. There will be an increase in support services costs once the local government pay award is known. That will be offset by a reduction in expenditure on attending meetings. There will be a significant reduction in income in 2020/21 without the UK Conference taking place. The healthy position that LARAC found itself in last year will assist in carrying us through 2020/21 and there is likely to be only a relatively minor call on the reserves that LARAC holds. At present a deficit of around £11,000 is forecast for the current financial year, which in the circumstances might seem a reasonable position in which to find ourselves.



LARAC ACCOUNTS

We have prepared the accounts shown from the books, vouchers and information supplied to us and we certify that they are in accordance therewith. We have not carried out an audit.

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2020

Income	2020	2019	Expenditure	2020	2019
Membership Subscription	117,313	109,630	LARAC Administration	84,324	83,054
Sale of Loop and copies	4,000	4,071	LARAC Website	1,591	605
Webs Sales	26,375	22,494	Honoraria	3,850	3,850
Conferences	54,424	35,891	Secondees	14,526	13,260
Interest	1,119	907	Meetings		
Miscellaneous	-	-	Executive	6,040	8,117
Other commercial activities	250	2,000	Regional	875	2,131
	<u>203,481</u>	<u>174,933</u>	Other	12,505	11,397
			Conferences		
			LARAC	1,446	1,514
			Other	438	1,270
			Insurance	1,850	1,552
			Subscriptions	620	600
			Magazine publications	21,836	29,145
			Exhibitions	898	1,257
			Promotional material	35	35
			Accountancy fees	890	640
			Depreciation	546	506
			VAT	2,901	3,298
			Business Plan	-	2,650
				<u>155,171</u>	<u>164,881</u>
			Surplus for the year	48,310	10,112

Balance sheet as at 31 March 2020

Fixed Assets	Cost less Depreciation To 31.03.19	Additions	Sales	Depreciation	Balance
Canon Photocopier	-				-
HP Printer	-				-
HP Printer	-				-
Furna Desk	56			56	-
Computer	250			250	-
Computer	-	722		240	482
	306	722	0	546	482
Current Assets					
Debtors			59,090		
Community A/C			59,341		
Deposit A/Cs			144,117		
			262,548		
Current Liabilities					
Received in Advance			110,839		
VAT			453		
Creditors			4,419		
			115,711		146,837
Total Net Assets					147,319
Represented by:-					
Capital Account					
Balance at 1st April 2019					99,009
Surplus for the year					48,310
Balance at 31st March 2020					147,319

POLICY OFFICER REPORT

This time last year major waste and recycling policies and proposed legislative changes including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Consistency in Collections (England) and Deposit Return Scheme (England, Wales and NI) were making steady progress by government and dominating the LARAC policy work. Up until March, LARAC was attending regular working group meetings hosted by Defra tackling questions arising from the first round of consultations and contributing to the shape of the second round of consultations.

With Covid-19 and the start of lockdown, central and local governments' priorities shifted to responding to the pandemic. Many waste policies and reforms were put on hold, including progressing EPR, DRS and Consistency. Over the last few months meetings have resumed and LARAC has been invited to attend again. LARAC continues to emphasise that any additional burdens or changes to local authority services need to be fully funded and delivered through fair and transparent mechanisms. Defra has indicated the next round of consultations is likely to be released early in 2021.

The Environment Bill is similarly having a turbulent ride through parliament. Changes in government in December 2019 meant the Bill had to be reintroduced and it passed the first reading in January 2020 with the second reading in March. The Bill needs to be considered by the Public Bill Committee but, due to Covid-19, sittings have been suspended until at least September.

The government has set an implementation date for introducing a plastic tax by April 2022. The tax will apply a rate of £200 tonne to plastic packaging which does not contain at least 30% recycled plastic. LARAC raised concerns in the recent Policy Design consultation that the proposed tax did not incentivise recycled materials to be sourced in the UK. If packaging suppliers source materials from overseas the tax would not achieve the anticipated stimulation of local markets, and local authorities may struggle to find markets for the material it has collected.

Other consultations we responded to this year include:

2 in Northern Ireland

LARAC welcomed many of the priorities identified in the DAERA Environment Strategy, especially inclusion of the Waste Hierarchy and Circular Economy. The proposals, outlined in the 'Road to Zero Waste' waste prevention programme review, were also supported by LARAC, especially those encouraging producers to improve the design and labelling of products to stimulate better reuse and recycling outcomes.

4 in Scotland

Scotland is forging ahead with introducing a Deposit Return Scheme. Legislation has been passed by Scottish Ministers that a Deposit Return Scheme will be introduced with a 20p deposit on aluminium and steel cans and plastic and glass drinks containers on 1 July 2022 (15 months later than initially proposed). LARAC continues to raise concerns about the uncertainty over the financial impact on local authorities and the payment measures which should be in place to compensate for any losses.

Ministers announced in April that it would not be progressing the Circular Economy Bill, there is currently no proposed date for reintroduction.

2 in Wales

The Welsh Government consulted on a proposal to require non-domestic properties to present food, paper, card, glass, plastic, metal, small WEEE and textiles separately for collection. This proposal was supported by LARAC as it offers greater opportunity to increase the nation's recycling rate without additional burdens on local authorities and represents a more equitable share in responsibility.

Proposals for how Wales can move towards a more circular economy were outlined in the 'Beyond Recycling' consultation which received general support from LARAC. Concern was raised over the proposal to amend the core materials in the Blueprint as an option for increasing recycling. LARAC advised any changes to core materials should only be introduced if long term stable markets were available.



THE LARAC YEAR

Business Plan

Just like everyone else LARAC had its best laid plans for 2020 but those were soon sidelined as Covid-19 hit. Thankfully, we had already made progress on some areas that we had planned to take forward regarding our policy work and also internally reviewing the resources we have.

LARAC was in the fortunate position that our support staff were already home based, and we have been using cloud-based systems and video calls for over six years. This meant we were able to operate with no break or changes to the services we provided for members; quite an achievement for such a small organisation.

Internally the focus has been on the structure of LARAC and the move from being an unincorporated body to an incorporated organisation and setting up a limited company. From the outside looking in this change should hardly be noticed but it does mean LARAC is on a much sounder footing financially and contractually. It also opens more possibilities regarding resources and ensures the finances we have can go as far as possible in representing our members and providing them with services of maximum use and value.

As we move forward into 2021, we will pick up the work that Covid-19 has delayed and review the resources LARAC needs for the future. Who knows, it may be that the new post-pandemic world will require us to change from what we do now and how we do it.



Membership Services

As mentioned above, as an organisation, we have been very resilient through the Covid-19 period and have been able to provide our memberships services to you uninterrupted. The situation did bring about some changes though and the regular content of the fortnightly LARAC Online made way for the stream of Covid-related information that was being disseminated by governments and others.

Members continue to take advantage of the individual log-in facility which gives access to the members' area of the website and access to LARAC Online. We now have around 700 people signed up from our member authorities. This helps get the information we send out more widely disseminated within our member organisations so each authority is able to get more value out of their membership. If you wish to have more colleagues signed up to LARAC OnLine and you wish to avoid sharing passwords, then get in touch at admin@larac.org.uk and we will arrange it.

This year we continued refining our invoicing process for membership fees with good results. We are experiencing fewer queries and problems and quicker payments so it is becoming ever more efficient. This is beneficial for both LARAC and members. It may sound boring and "just admin" but if we can get the membership payments process really honed it releases time for attending to our members' needs, and that is why we are here!

THE LARAC YEAR

Policy Progress

This year has been book ended by work on the three main policy areas of the Resource and Waste Strategy: Consistency of Collections; DRS and EPR for packaging. Defra started stakeholder engagement in early 2020 with a view, at the time, of releasing the second set of consultations later in the year. Work was progressing well on all three areas and LARAC was involved in working groups in each topic as well as being one of only two local authority organisations on a cross cutting steering group.

The work stopped while we all tackled Covid-19 but now all the engagement work has restarted and LARAC has resumed its active role in a variety of working groups and meetings across all the policy areas. It is likely the next set of consultations will come out in 2021 and it will be interesting to see the detail they go into in this round and how they have evolved from the first consultations.

Being a UK-wide organisation, we know that it is not only Defra that generates policy and legislation that impacts on our members. We have been working to strengthen our links with policy makers in Scotland and have been active in responding to the DRS drive there - during the year we have responded to four Scotland consultations. We have also recently taken steps to develop further our relationship with Scottish Government and an initial meeting was very productive, and likely to be the first of many. It is still relatively early days but with the resumption of Government in Northern Ireland there will be further engagement work to do as waste policy develops for councils there. During the year we have responded to two NI consultations. In Wales we have responded to two consultations in the year and we are in the early stages of seeking a closer relationship with the government.



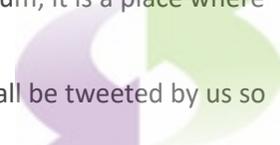
Communications

This year we took the decision to increase our range of articles in LARAC OnLine and cease production of the Loop. The Loop was first produced in 2002 and ran for 69 issues. Obviously, the communications landscape is very different from 2002, we consume our news and information in many more ways. Also the size and make up of council waste teams has changed irrevocably. The Exec felt the time was right to move from a print format to online articles delivered more often. The new online articles will be introduced into LARAC OnLine in October 2020 and will be found on a new 'Features' page on the website.

LARAC Online's move to Mailchimp a couple of years ago meant that this year it was more a case of fine-tuning the content than any big presentation changes. Of course, our best laid plans were scuppered by the appearance of the Covid-19 pandemic. LARAC Online was for a period dedicated totally to Covid-19 related information. We also sent out a much increased number of member emails during the period to ensure members had the latest information in a timely fashion. We could see, by the opening rate, that this and our other Covid-19 communications, were much appreciated by our members. (More on this in the next section). But now it seems that working life in the waste world is returning to something, if not the old 'normal', that is more predictable and so LARAC OnLine will now continue developing in the way we envisaged at the beginning of the year with new Features looking at issues that are effecting the industry now and reflecting on what is going on in our members councils.

The LARAC website continues to be well used by members and has been augmented by putting all our Covid-19 related information, including guidelines updates, into the [Useful Documents page](#) and the discussion forum always throws up interesting questions and topics that members are grappling with. The new Features page will become active in October, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Members can continue to support each other by using the forum and exchanging the valuable information you all hold. Use this private discussion forum, it is a place where you can get real value from your LARAC membership.

We are tweeting more often now: vacancy ads, our news and blogs, and our new features will all be tweeted by us so do follow us @LARACSpeaks - and send us your news so we can showcase your work!



COVID-19 WORK

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about a change to work and social life that we have never seen before. The fact that the services provided by our members were maintained to the levels they were is a fantastic achievement, one you should all be rightly proud of. LARAC found itself acting as a channel for information from Government to our members, disseminating key government and industry information as well as providing input back to Government on the issues impacting on local authority waste services.

LARAC was also part of the local government group that took it upon itself to run weekly surveys to see how services were performing. This was quickly picked up and used by Defra and provided valuable insight into what services were operating and the problems that were causing any disruption.

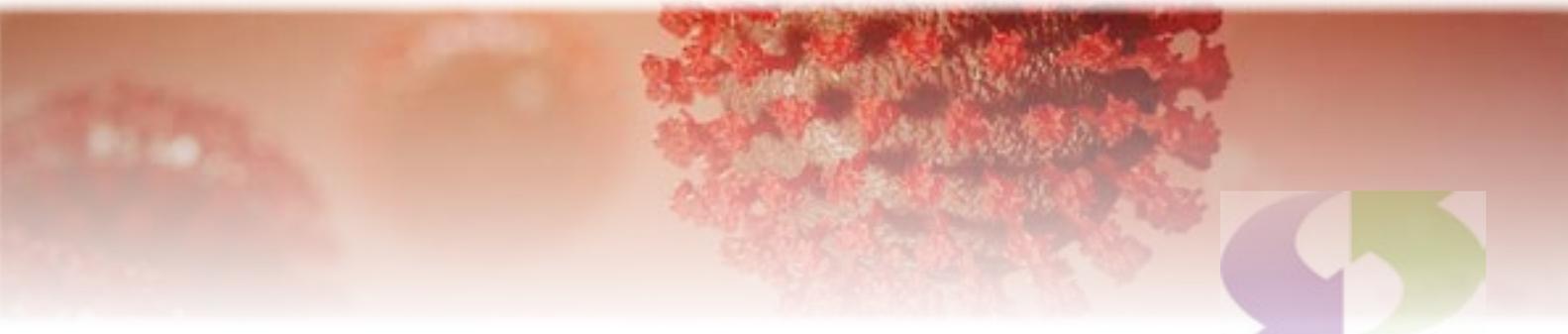


We created specific news and information pages on the LARAC website to collate and present all the various information and guidance documents that were being produced so that members could access it all easily and quickly.

As mentioned above we sent out alert emails when new information was available or when things such as the WISH guidance was updated. At the time we worried if we were sending out too much, but feedback was positive, and the updates were well received and valued by members.

LARAC's standing with Defra meant that we were included in discussions, meetings and working groups from the start which then helped us to get timely access to the latest information for our members and gave us a channel to feed information back into Government.

The weekly phone calls on Covid-19 with Defra were just one example of the access we benefitted from and we made sure that we got the notes from those discussions out to members on the afternoon after the morning call.



THE CONFERENCES

We have said elsewhere in the annual report that LARAC was able to continue virtually unchanged throughout the Covid-19 period, but one obvious exception was the ability to run our normal conference programme. First the Scotland LARAC Conference due in May was pushed back to July before being moved again to December. The LARAC Wales Conference has also been postponed until December and we are hopeful that both these events will be able to take place face to face. But, with the UK nations all adopting different responses to Covid-19 only time will tell if we are able to meet you all in Glasgow and Llandrindod Wells.

In contrast to other organisations, we took the decision to cancel the UK LARAC 2020 Conference in Birmingham relatively early. It was the right thing to do and it meant we had time to plan a virtual LARAC Conference. We are one of the few major waste events to adopt this approach so we will be interested to see what the take up, response and feedback is. Even if it is a great success there is no intention to replace the normal conference with a virtual one going forward. Indeed, we have our dates in 2021 and 2022 reserved with the Hilton Birmingham Metropole already.



We had a very successful move to the new venue at the NEC in 2019 after several years holding the LARAC UK Conference in Nottingham. The new venue with the considerably larger area available to the event allowed us to increase the number of exhibitors and made networking and lunch a much better experience than hitherto. It also meant that all delegates could be accommodated in the same hotel. So: no shuttle buses (apart from the station buses), and a much better conference experience all round. The feedback from the 2019 event was overall very positive but we have identified some areas where there could be improvements. These informed the plans for LARAC 2020 before Covid-19 hit. But, undaunted, we will carry those plans forward to 2021.

We did hold a well-attended webinar in lieu of the original Scotland Conference date and as we all become comfortable in the electronic world LARAC will be looking at the possibility of specific webinars for members to support our conferences going forward.

Hopefully in the annual report next year we will be able to tell the stories of the Scotland and Wales events and also look forward to seeing colleagues in person at LARAC 2021 in Birmingham!



ENGLISH REGIONS

EAST

Rebecca Piper

Suffolk County Council

I can't believe it's been a year since I joined LARAC as the Eastern Representative –time really has flown!

As part of my role I have represented LARAC at a Waste Data Flow user group meeting and brought councils' voices forward at Exec meetings on a range of topics such as "compostable" plastics disposal options, sharps disposal and legislation changes. As changes to sharps disposal had already happened here in Suffolk, I had discussions with multiple authorities who were undergoing similar changes and was able to feed this back to LARAC.

The last couple of months have been a bit of a steep learning curve here in the East (as I am sure it has been elsewhere!) where we have to get services back up and running, "Covid secure" and putting in new processes to achieve this (e.g. booking systems/ restrictions at Recycling Centres, social distancing measures, protection of site and collection crew staff etc).

At this time I really saw the value of being part of LARAC as a national body, because when situations were quickly changing due to Covid-19, we were being kept up to date, and we were part of the group lobbying DEFRA/national government to get local authority voices heard.

EAST MIDLANDS

Eloise Attwood

South Northamptonshire Council

2020 – the year of the key worker!

This year has shown us a lot of things, none more so for our sector than how important key workers are to the day to day running of services in a global pandemic. We normally receive the odd thank you and often complaints and negative feedback can outweigh the good, but to receive standing ovations on the doorstep and hand-written thank you messages was a huge morale boost for the frontline staff during the peak of the crisis.

Lockdown has led to so many changes to day to day life which have had an immediate impact on how much waste is being produced and where. The next challenge will be to see how long these changes last and what impact it will have on long term planning for waste collection and treatment services.

We must not lose sight of course that we will still need to implement the Waste Strategy in the future and as things begin to settle back down, we will need the input of all our members on the issues of EPR, DRS and consistency. It will be sad not to have our traditional conference this year and catch up with the East Midlands members but here's hoping for 2021!

LONDON

Cindy Gardener

London Borough of Hounslow

I joined the LARAC Executive in May 2020, when the 'Stay at Home' message had just changed to 'Stay Alert' and we saw some lifting of the 'lockdown' measures in the UK.

The reopening of HWRCs was happening in a controlled way and collection services such as bulky waste and green waste, suspended in some areas, started to resume. Clapping for the NHS and key workers ceased and we started to reflect on London recovering in a Green way and Build Back Better. Wow, what strange months for our industry, from our response to Stay at Home increased volumes of domestic waste, to sharing of information, via London Networks, our waste disposal authorities and webinars providing essential information in new ways.

Earlier this year the final cohort of Reduction and Recycling Plans were approved by the Mayor of London. The RRP's set out each Council's response to the objectives, targets and policies in the London Environment Strategy. It will be interesting to see how we may need to adapt these plans and activities considering C-19. The cost implications of C-19 will set challenges, and we need to be mindful of long-term changes to how people live and work in London.

I'd like to thank Dimitra Rappou for representing London over the past few years. I hope to see many of you at the virtual LARAC conference in October!

ENGLISH REGIONS

NORTH EAST

Victoria Burrell

Durham County Council

The public have never been so aware of their waste and recycling behaviours as during the lockdown period! Compared to last year, waste and recycling tonnages collected have been astronomic across the country and the North East region.

The small region of the NE benefits from the North East Recycling Forum (NERF). The NERF, sponsored by LARAC, meets four times a year with an annual conference held around the end of November. The range of speakers and networking opportunities are highly valued by delegates. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the NERF held two meetings, and I am pleased to announce that the NERF will hold its first 'online' meeting in September. NERF meetings have an attendance of over 70 representatives from the industry, and the 'Friends of NERF' continues to grow.

Collaboration is essential and despite the Covid-19 pandemic and all its challenges, this has continued. For example, seven of the North East Local Authorities have been working in partnership to procure a 40-year energy from waste (EfW) project potentially worth £2.1 billion. Durham County Council, Newcastle City Council, Middlesbrough and the boroughs of Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees plan to build an 'energy recovery facility' with a 450,000 tonnes per annum capacity.

I encourage all NE LARAC members to use the LARAC website and read LARAC Online – valuable sources of information. If you have not previously attended the annual LARAC Conference, I would highly recommend it, even though this year, for the first time it will be online!

NORTH WEST

Carole Taylor

Pendle Borough Council

November 2019 saw the fourth annual joint CIWM/LARAC Open Meeting kindly hosted by Suez at their Darwen site. Attendees were able to have a tour of the Terracycle facility to see what happens to the all the unusual materials that are sent for reprocessing. Stephen Clarke from Terracycle also gave a presentation on their new Loop initiative, which has recently gone live.

We're hoping to repeat this popular event at Suez on Friday 20 November 2020. But if Covid-19 prevents this, then we're looking to do it as an online event.

Some of the North West highlights this year have been: Cheshire West and Chester launched their new waste company Cheshire West Recycling; Cheshire East opened anew IVC food and garden waste composting plant; Cumbria brought back in-house the service provision of the HWRC permit scheme; Merseyside increased the Community Fund by £50k with £165k available for waste prevention & reuse projects; Lancashire introduced plastic pots, tubs and trays into kerbside and reduced the opening times of HWRCs; and Greater Manchester Combined Authority introduced changes to HWRCs aimed at reducing trade abuse.

Fingers crossed that we may be able to meet North West colleagues at the joint CIWM/LARAC event on 20 Nov 2020, socially distanced of course.

SOUTH EAST

Ian Upstone

Cherwell District Council

Wow, what a year! The waste industry is never boring. Up to the start of 2020 all the focus was on the new government waste strategy, which we expected would dominate our thoughts for the next couple of years. Little did we know that Covid-19 was just around the corner!

Councils in the SE have been amazing given so many challenges: There was a 15% - 25% rise in waste and recycling collected; issues dealing with social distancing in the workforce; high levels of absence; processors struggling to deal with the extra materials and office staff working from home. There was an incredible public response to staff providing these services, showing appreciation for their hard work and dedication to the job. I am very keen for LARAC to help and support our SE members throughout these difficult times. Virtual working allows our voice to be heard. The issues for SE councils will not change due to C-19 but they will become bigger and more difficult to resolve:

- Contamination rates rising with processors requiring a better quality of recycling due to a worldwide recession.
- Finances of councils hit hard by C-19 leading to service reviews, and more??
- Councils sharing more services to reduce costs, leading to more unitary type councils.
- What impact will the Government waste strategy have on kerbside collections?
- Continued increases in household waste and recycling levels.

These issues occupy our waste and recycling discussions along with the government consultations, which may be good or bad for local authorities we will see! These are exciting times to be in waste!

ENGLISH REGIONS

SOUTH WEST

Dawn Fearne

Gloucester City Council

Firstly, I'd like to say it has been a privilege to represent the South West for the past two years. I received a warm welcome at LARAC and it has been a rewarding experience taking SW issues to our Exec meetings, comparing them with the other regions and countries in the UK and then seeing those experiences transform into messages taken to government. So it is with sadness I have to stand down and I wish the next SW rep the very best for representing our special area of the country.

Despite C-19 we have soldiered on with plans that were already in motion when the pandemic hit us. Somerset is about to roll out 3 weekly refuse collections and is already hitting the media, so watch this space. Gloucestershire will shortly enter into a new Gloucestershire Joint Waste Partnership agreement which means, with the new Government White Paper due in September, we are likely to see more service alignment where possible, with a TECKEL arrangement already in place for 4 out of 6 districts in Gloucestershire there are interesting times ahead.

We lost our SWWRF meetings this year, and of course our annual conference was cancelled due to that which I won't name again. But I look forward to seeing everybody next year, when, in the words (roughly) of the late Dame Vera Lynn, I hope we will all meet again (in facemasks).

WEST MIDLANDS

Dan Roberts

South Staffordshire Council

Sadly, there is one topic that has dominated the news over the past 12 months, and it would not be possible to reflect on the year without recognising the impact of the global pandemic on our lives and the services that we deliver.

Like many I have seen first-hand the dedication of local authority waste and resource professionals, who rose to the unprecedented challenges that the pandemic presented. Within this sector we rarely have the opportunity to reflect on our efforts, as a new challenge is often already upon us, so it is right for me to take this opportunity to express my pride in the professionalism, flexibility and innovation demonstrated by local authorities across the West Midlands and beyond.

Our crews were rightly lauded by residents for the vital services that they continued to provide, overcoming challenges on a daily basis. Through enhanced collaboration we worked efficiently, quickly and safely to ensure that we delivered on the key principle of our services: the protection of human and environmental health, at a time when this was more vital than ever.

YORKSHIRE & HUMBER

James Ward

Kingston-upon-Hull City Council

Just over a year ago I took over as Yorkshire and Humber rep, attending my first Exec meeting in October 2019 at the new conference venue, the impressive Birmingham Metropole.

A busy first year (!) with authorities keenly watching developments from the consultations on the Resource & Waste Strategy, maintaining frontline operations while dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and then managing the re-opening of HWRCs. Networking with councils, sharing differing local approaches in one of the most challenging periods in the history of local government has been invaluable. Members used the LARAC members' forum, providing feedback and sharing their responses to Covid-19. Y&H Councils continue to share good practice at a quarterly officers group kindly hosted by Leeds City Council where I provide a LARAC update and take views from members to feed back to the Executive.

Despite the challenges in terms of budgets and pressure on the recycling market, the region continues to show innovation and resilience with changes in kerbside schemes, improvements in sorting at HWRCs, working on the development of larger regional treatment facilities, developing trade waste HWRCs and route optimisation, to name but a few areas.

LARAC is a member focused organisation here to represent your views. Please get in contact with me if you require any assistance.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Now the Government is back up and running consultations have begun to proliferate and Northern Ireland waste management development has been dominated by the NI Environment Strategy and the Waste Prevention Programme.

LARAC has responded to two NI consultations in the past year on these subjects, and is in the process of preparing our response to the latest from DAERA: the Discussion on the “Future Recycling and Separate Collection of Waste of a Household Nature in Northern Ireland”.

In February we responded to the DAERA consultation on the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy – where DAERA consulted on the priorities for their Environment Strategy. Proposed priorities for the Strategy include the Circular Economy and application of the waste hierarchy, which LARAC supported. Emphasis was made on the fundamental role producers play in product and packaging design for recyclability and for this to align with collection and reprocessing facilities. Comment was also made that any policy or legislative change needs to be supported by appropriate regulation and enforcement powers. In March we responded to the DAERA consultation on the Waste Prevention Programme for NI – which aimed at maintaining a downward trend in waste arisings – having a significant impact on meeting EU landfill diversion targets. The Waste prevention programme also aims at supporting and promoting resource efficiency and the sustainable use of resources in Northern Ireland, whilst ensuring a shift towards a more circular economy. Looking forward LARAC has the ambition to prepare our consultation responses in good time so that where it is appropriate we can send them out to our Northern Ireland members for them to use to furnish their own responses.



Northern Ireland landfills approximately 300,000 tonnes of waste and exports a further 140,000 of residual black bin waste each year to fuel Energy from Waste plants across Europe.

Work ‘on the ground’ to address these figures while moving to a more circular economy can be seen in the work done by the arc21 Group of 6 councils in the East of the Province. The councils are (mostly LARAC members): Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Belfast City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. 2020, despite Covid-19, saw the presentation of a report on the arc21 Beacon project seeking to develop necessary infrastructure to deal with NI residual waste ‘at home’, and create jobs. The project will deliver a sustainable approach to NI’s residual black bin waste and divert it from landfill, developing more recycling facilities and an Energy from Waste plant generating enough electricity to power 30,000 homes. It will be council-owned and serve the needs of arc21’s six member councils, almost 60% of NI’s population. The report by Grant Thornton into the arc21 residual waste product, presented in June, said the project, funded by foreign direct investment, was an essential element of Northern Ireland’s waste management plans and a significant economic enabler. The report found that the development of these facilities would provide capacity to deal with NI waste and turn it into something with less impact on the environment, create jobs and support an economic recovery by growing the NI circular economy and clean energy sectors.

In the North West of Northern Ireland is the North West Region Waste Management Group, a voluntary coalition of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and Derry City and Strabane District Councils. With a recycling rate of over 38% the NWRMG’s waste management plan is designed to help move those figures to 50% by 2020.

If there is sufficient interest, we would like to run a webinar for our members in NI in 2021. If you have suggestions for a subject please get in touch with us at admin@larac.org.uk.

SCOTLAND

I have thoroughly enjoyed my second year representing LARAC in Scotland during 2019-2020. The experience of representing Scottish local authorities on the LARAC Executive continues to be incredibly rewarding.

It has been an unusual year for us all due to the restrictions of the novel coronavirus. LARAC has been at the forefront of many of the important strategy discussions held centrally to determine how we manage the operational implications of Covid-19 and put in place mitigation measures. As things slowly ease back to some form of normality, we can start to consider what lies ahead for all of us working within the LA resource management sector.

As the implications of DRS, EPR and collections consistency become gradually clearer, there is much work to be done to ensure that these most significant of policy changes can be implemented for the benefit of LAs and the environment as a whole. The political and policy landscape is fast paced and we must endeavour to keep up with it. My view of that landscape within Scotland is summarised below.



DRS

The Scottish Government is driving forward its plans for an all-in, “return to retail” DRS for glass, PET and aluminium cans. There is however still some uncertainty on how DRS (Scotland) will impact the tonnages collected by LAs at the kerbside. With Zero Waste Scotland now committed to delivering the scheme from July 1st, 2022, we have a few years longer to find out.

Household Recycling Charter

The number of Councils which have signed up to the Charter in Scotland still stands at 30, with all at various stages of implementation. In terms of Code of Practice aligned LAs, there are currently eight LAs aligned with at least five or six others very closely aligned. In terms of progress towards consistency across Scotland, I think it is fair to say that it has been interrupted by other policy developments (DRS and EPR) as well as Covid-19. I am sure that the benefits of a more standardised collection system across Scotland will deliver the aims and objectives of the Charter. It will however be very interesting to see how these new collection systems perform across the country and the effect they have on recycling rates and quality of materials collected.

LARAC Scotland Conference

The Scotland conference, due to be held in Glasgow on 29th April, was a victim of Covid-19 restrictions, unfortunately. We did hold a successful virtual conference on July 1st where we heard updates on DRS, EPR and the waste sector generally. We have tentatively re-arranged for the conference to be held in Glasgow on December 1st 2020.

In Conclusion

Within my Exec role I have learnt a lot in terms of what’s involved in representing LARAC members, how the Executive represents LARAC up and down the country and how LARAC is working incredibly hard to influence key policy changes. The level of professionalism and commitment in our sector is something to be proud of; it is also something LARAC has helped nurture by providing membership with an informative website, regular policy updates and assistance when needed. The levels of experience, dynamism and determination shown by my LARAC Exec colleagues to make positive changes while supporting our members is truly inspiring.

WALES

38 years in the world of waste, 18 years in local government and now into year 8 representing Wales with LARAC. With all that experience it should be getting easier? But these have been unimaginable, turbulent, troubled, stressful, complicated, taxing and unheard-of times (see how I avoided saying un-precedented?).

Wales still has its statutory targets. We still need to recycle 64% (and maybe more) - but now with social distancing, collection crew bubbles, potential quarantining of material and all those associated extra costs.

Of course there was no Welsh Conference this summer, but had there been we would have been talking about how to reach these targets in times of austerity, falling material prices and increasing demand for quality recycling (as I write this, storm Ellen is battering the window and our processors are complaining about wet cardboard!) – so nothing’s changed there. The Deposit Return and Extended Producer Responsibility would have been on the agenda, as would the demise of single use plastics. Now we seem to have forgotten about Deposit Return as we talk about the growth of single use plastics in these Covid times and a massive increase in litter in general – all of a sudden we need loads more litter bins, according to the keyboard warriors, as food containers become council property once they are empty!



It’s how to run services in a pandemic. How to open up HWRCs, the merits of a booking in system – proving popular with many authorities considering keeping what started as a short term fix to control traffic, but seeing the benefits of encouraging residents to recycle more, the data to enable efficient staffing levels on site and even provide help in infrastructure planning. Maybe sometimes a crisis is needed to make radical changes?

Prior to all this chaos, LARAC consulted with Welsh Government on their Circular Economy Strategy. Increasing recycling rates which would probably mean an increase in the minimum statutory targets on local authorities and revising the collections Blueprint to potentially include other recycling streams. Opportunity for investment support in waste management infrastructure, remanufacturing and decarbonising collection fleets is also included.

If I’m re-elected this year I’ll continue to be proud to continue to represent my adoptive country (more than happy not to be English when it comes to the world of waste) – but am looking forward to getting back to debating the merits of the Deposit Return Scheme, Extended Producer Responsibilities and the definition of a clean Pizza box.



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