

# THE LOOP



## Conference on the move

Highlights from LARAC Conference



An overview of the 2019 LARAC  
Conference from Birmingham

Q&A with Julie Gallacher, UK  
Sustainability Lead, Nespresso

LARAC Celebration Award winners

# Editorial

**John Coates**, LARAC Treasurer and Policy Officer



**W**ell, as I look over the crisp morning skyline of Lincoln from our EFW, I have the chance to reflect on this year's LARAC Conference at Birmingham's NEC.

The hours spent in LARAC Exec meetings, deliberating and soul searching over whether a move from Nottingham was the right thing to do, followed by many hours of research by EMG finding suitable alternative venues and putting together a conference package priced within the budget set by the Exec, seems to have been worthwhile.

And now it is done and dusted! The general consensus among the delegates, sponsors and exhibitors I spoke to is that, overall, the new venue is better. One location for everyone with a central exhibition and meeting place gave a more homogenous and natural feel and promoted better networking and socialising. The level of chatter in the exhibition hall was noticeably lively and engaging.

What of the conference itself? The main hall was packed from start to finish every day. A variety of opinions took their turn upon the podium. Some were challenging, whether in

content or the very nature of their business, which in turn invited some excited responses from delegates.

It was lively and those delegates I spoke to liked having a large table to put papers and drinks on, and moving around was easier than in the lecture theatre setting of previous years. My conclusion is that the larger space benefited everyone.

It was a fresh change to see colleagues from Defra and WRAP talk to us about a real thing this year, in the shape of the published Resources and Waste Strategy, rather than an ethereal promise of 'jam tomorrow'.

No doubt the English delegates in the hall all furiously wrote down the promises of 'fully funded' and 'no increase in council tax' to take back to our town hall financiers to ease their worried minds.

Scotland leads the way on DRS and the update from Zero Waste Scotland on the progress of its impending scheme was intently listened to, no matter which administration you work within. We await the results of the scheme with keen interest.

The success of the 2019 conference has set a high bar for next year's event, don't you think?

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recycling, I can't help but think  
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The last couple of months have been very conference-orientated. Does it ever get any easier chairing a national conference? No, it doesn't! It was especially daunting to be chairing LARAC Conference 2019 at a new venue, wondering if it would be as good as the one in Nottingham where we have been quite comfortable for a few years. I am pleased to say that all seemed to run smoothly from my point of view, and those I talked to agreed the venue was better in size with all the delegates, speakers and sponsors under one roof.

I took a hands-on approach this year in handing out the LARAC Celebration Awards. As always, the awards were an opportunity to highlight the best of the best, and as a judge it was difficult to choose the winners as the standard of entries was very high. We have a rundown of the winners on pages 21-23 and you can also check out our website where we will be highlighting more of the finalists in due course.

At the end of September, I attended my first RECOUP conference held in Peterborough and chaired a panel session in the afternoon. The

conference was attended by lots of different organisations all related to the plastics industry, with BBC Countryfile's Tom Heap chairing a morning session.

I heard a new word used at the RECOUP conference – plastiphobia. This describes the knee-jerk reaction of some organisations to ban plastic in order to please the public who think that every piece of plastic is a menace to society. In the panel session I chaired, there was a speaker from McDonald's who was quick to address the paper straw issue that has been in the media recently. Their answer was that they fully intend to find a market to recycle their paper straws as the company sees fibre as the way forward. But for now, we watch as millions of paper straws are used and put into residual waste.

The Environment Bill has just been published – the primary legislation needed to support many principles of the government's Environment Plan and Resources and Waste Strategy, e.g. EPR, consistent collections and DRS. There is a process to go through before it becomes law, via various readings in the House of Commons and the House of Lords before finally receiving Royal

Assent, so there could be changes along the way – though these will now have to wait until the outcome of the general election.

We're still waiting to find out what will happen in the next round of consultations, and whilst it feels very quiet in the world of waste and recycling, I can't help but think this is the calm before the storm. Looking back on 2019, it has been a very busy year for LARAC and I think 2020 will be another hectic year for us all.

I'm looking forward to making sure the local authority voice is heard loud and clear as future engagement opportunities are realised and I will make sure to keep you all informed of our progress.

**Carole Taylor, LARAC Chair**



LARAC Policy Officer **Durk Reyner** looks at the debate regarding insourcing and outsourcing of local authority waste services

“ Whether to run frontline services in-house or to outsource them will depend on the local circumstances of each individual authority ”

Whether to run local authority waste services in-house or to outsource them to the private sector seems to be something everybody has an opinion on.

Over the years, councils have wrestled with the strategic decision process on whether to insource or outsource key frontline services. Councillors and officers would have considered the positives for outsourcing, such as a lack of in-house capacity, a need to shake up the way things are done, ensuring long-term service surety, demonstrating value for money, and the maintenance of minimised financial risk.

These positives need to be weighed against the positives of insourcing, taking into account a view that councils can more easily make rapid service changes to meet the changing demands of residents, not having to pay dividends to shareholders from profits equating to all service expenditure going into service provision, as well as a greater accountability of service and destiny.

This debate is also being played out at a national level, with political parties taking different views on the benefits of nationalised services versus the private sector-managed services.

Both insourcing and outsourcing have a litany of positive and negative aspects to their name – whether these aspects reveal themselves to be positive or negative in practice will largely depend on the circumstances of each particular local authority.

At the LARAC Conference, private sector representatives eloquently explained their experience and views of the benefits the markets can provide.

They reasoned that outsourcing allowed the transfer of operational risk, though a counterargument from many client officers of private contracts may argue an authority shares the risk whether in-house or outsourced. It was also argued that the private sector offers more flexibility; again, councils with outsourced services may counter that the outsourced service is only as flexible as the specification.

Delegates had a presentation on the experience of bringing services in-house from Liverpool Streetscene Services, which argued that in-house services allowed an authority to retain a clarity of purpose and priorities, and to set out different ways of working with residents, communities and partners. Client officers of outsourced services may express that all of this can be achieved if an authority has a good working partnership with the private sector, well-written specifications and clear and supportive communications arrangements between the authority and private contractor.

In reality, whether to run frontline services in-house or to outsource them will depend on the local circumstances of each authority and the experience of officers regarding managing an in-house service or working as a client of an outsourced service.

Both ways can be equally successful when planned well with good leadership, appropriate resources, a workforce that is supportive of the service and commitment from councillors and officers.

Ultimately, local authorities themselves are in the best position to assess their strengths, weaknesses, what works for them and what doesn't.

# A year of lessons

The **LARAC 2018 Scholars** look back over their shoulders at their experience of the past year and what knowledge they have gained of our booming sector

The LARAC Scholarship provided me with a much broader understanding of the resources and waste industry, both in the public and private sectors, and how the industry is moving forward as a whole. This has helped influence my work with regards to decision-making and has provided me with the ability to give concise and well-rounded advice to queries from members of the public, businesses, fellow colleagues and political members.

In the year since my experience as a LARAC Scholar, there have been many instances where I have been able to apply what I learned and make use of the contacts and ideas I took away from the event.

The conference is an excellent way to learn about the world of waste from people involved and the Scholarship Programme is a unique kick-start to anyone new to the industry.

The benefits I have received since being a 2018 LARAC Scholar are unbelievable. It has given me so much confidence in not only what I do day to day, but also confidence that I'm in the correct industry – a growing industry.

Meeting people in the same boat as me has given me self-assurance that we are doing a good job and many examples of how to improve my services.

While addressing the familiar topics for local authorities, the Scholarship Programme also allowed some exploration into wider ideas and areas of discussion – something that we do not always have the luxury of time and space to do in our everyday roles. This was inspiring.

In the past year, I have used my experience and networking opportunities at LARAC to get a new job at Neath Port Talbot Council as a graduate municipal services officer. I am now being trained to become a manager and gaining a vast amount of experience across the waste service including in permitting and regulations, procurement, service changes and QGIS mapping.

A year on since the conference, my confidence and knowledge of waste services has significantly increased. I now also have a wider and broader understanding of the industry.

This has helped me greatly when I am undertaking tasks day-to-day and led to me becoming more involved in several projects within the team.

As a result of gaining a better sense of my position within the industry, I've been better placed to make key decisions and I'm more aware of the wider issues affecting us, where I can access information and support, and that we're not isolated within our own authorities. Knowledge I gained at conference has helped me procure collection services, liaise with other authorities to implement IT systems and payment options for chargeable services, and understand the current Resources and Waste Strategy consultation process far better.

The variety of speakers alongside the Scholar-specific session gave me a wider vision of the waste industry which I feel I wouldn't have got without attending the conference.

The information and knowledge I was able to obtain from the Scholarship has helped me to inform work colleagues on industry-specific information, such as the EPR and DRS, giving them an insight into both and what they could potentially mean for local authorities in the future.



# A scholar's experience

As the **LARAC 2019 Scholars** began a year of learning about the waste and recycling sector at this year's LARAC Conference thanks to the kind support of REPIC, we hear their views on this year's event

The introductory Scholar seminar was really thought-provoking. It was great to meet the Exec team of LARAC and have an opportunity to meet fellow new faces to the waste industry. The 'box, bin, bag' game was a great icebreaker too!

I found the Scholars' afternoon very enjoyable and gave lots of food for thought. I immediately felt at ease meeting and chatting to fellow Scholars about their roles and it is comforting to know we face similar challenges in our day jobs.

## DAY ONE

Day One as a whole was great! Hearing from professionals across the industry gave a great insight into the different perspectives around waste. It was clear that the waste industry is at a turning point, and I found it empowering hearing that through the different presentations.

I thought that the debates and the question and answer sessions were really well done and provided extra pieces of information that I could relate back to my job and my authority.

I enjoyed the fact that LARAC isn't afraid to invite controversial organisations, such as Nespresso, which really stimulated the debate and got everybody really talking to each other!

## AWARDS

The awards ceremony was an impressive celebration of what people are achieving in the sector, with some excellent dancing to round off the day!

The opportunity to get dressed up and attend an awards ceremony was amazing. It was great to hear about all the finalists and it was very inspirational.

## DAY TWO

I found the workshops were a great opportunity to learn from those with more experience in the sector and talk more in-depth about issues and ideas – I wish there had been more time as I found them really valuable.

I would've liked to hear more from London boroughs, as issues faced by London are (in my opinion) quite unique compared to the rest of the UK. Nevertheless, the sessions were engaging and having the ability to choose what I wanted to attend was perfect!

I felt that these workshops were my biggest benefit, and something I could carry into my current role. They were more intimate and gave me a chance to learn from others.

## OVERALL

I would recommend anyone and everyone to apply for the Scholarship, or to attend the conference – either way, it's a great learning experience, and a chance to network with a variety of people from different backgrounds!

The LARAC Conference has been a whirlwind and I have enjoyed every moment. It has been eye-opening to see the passion people have within the sector, from the local authority level all the way through to supporting organisations and business sponsors.

Regular networking sessions between the talks were a welcome opportunity to interact with the event sponsors as well as seeing what emerging technologies may help shape the future landscape of recycling and waste management.



# Increasing returns

**the Loop** talked to three industry experts about what they think will be the most significant impact of a deposit return scheme for local authorities

## David Barnes

Programme Manager, Deposit Return Scheme, Zero Waste Scotland

Scotland's DRS will dramatically increase the number of drinks containers that are recycled, but local authorities will see fewer bottles and cans captured through kerbside bins.

This shift is an opportunity to review operating models, including the way staff and vehicles that collect the material from households are used and how alternative materials could be captured. High capture of materials will also mean fewer bottles and cans finding their way into the residual waste stream, lowering disposal costs.

With a 20 pence incentive to return your empty bottle or can, we expect to see fewer drinks littering our streets and green spaces. Not only is that a chance to make savings on litter collection, it will also help address a common source of community concern.

DRS will mean big changes and Zero Waste Scotland will support local authorities to maximise the economic and environmental benefits of these.



## Dan Roberts

Waste Management Officer, South Staffordshire Council

Whilst local authority concerns regarding the loss of higher value recyclable material from the kerbside remain tangible, I see the antagonism between DRS and mandatory kerbside collection of in-scope material posing a potentially greater risk to efficient collection and reprocessing services and associated contracts.

The implementation of a DRS will reduce both the range and quantity of material collected at the kerbside. The extent of this impact is subject to factors outside the control of local authorities, like deposit value, for example, accessibility of return points and public communication. If legislative requirements are not aligned, councils could effectively be required to compete unnecessarily for material at the kerbside, putting in place services and long-term contracts to collect and reprocess material that, subject to the launch of a successful DRS, should not be there! Such a scenario would pose a significant risk for councils.



## Paul Vanston CEO, INCPEN

Good news! Councils may not need to be quite so fearful over DRS. Here are some thoughts, which I'm happy to debate.

**Costs:** Proposals for extended producer responsibility will mean packaging producers pay the 'full net costs' of dealing with packaging. This is the big game changer akin to implementing DRS as a lone initiative.

**Performance:** Councils' performance on recycling beverage packaging should fall, though the argument for a DRS is that capture, quality and recycling performance will all increase. Actually, freeing up much-needed space in recycling bins enables a communications campaign to capture far more items from bathrooms and kitchens.

**Public satisfaction:** Public support for a DRS seems high according to a variety of surveys. However, that does not automatically translate to public 'satisfaction'. The quality of the preparation and implementation stages are critical, and the implementation of a single UK-wide DRS is preferred.