

Wharf Chambers members meeting

Monday 16th April 2018

Note from Harvey, minute taker:

*I would like to apologise to anyone whose comments or questions weren't recorded here, accurately or at all - it was a difficult meeting to minute but I want to make sure that people's contributions are represented. **If there are any revisions or additions you'd like to see made to the minutes, please comment on this document or email members@wharfchambers.org and I will make the necessary changes.***

Aim: We want to provide members with a space to ask questions of the Co-op and Club Collective about recent discussions around racism and response to abuse. We also want to ask questions of members, and to offer updates. We hope this conversation will help members to feel safer accessing the space by discussing strategies moving forward. This meeting is intended as part of a process, not the end, of discussion between Wharf Chambers and its members around these topics.

Facilitator: Pauline Mayers

Co-operative members present: Eleanor, Claire, Raino, Cassie, Danny

Elected Club Collective members present: Pat, Katherine, Dan, Harvey (minutes)

Brainstorm: *what do you think Wharf Chambers (WC) is? What does it do? Who is it for?*

- Community
- A bar
- Workers co-op: "means different things to different people"
- Venue for music, performance etc.
- Social space – a place to make friends
- Socially economical venue – money made goes back into the venue
- Important part of Leeds' DIY scene – a unique space

Claire and Raino presented a short history of Wharf Chambers and explained its structure.

Wharf Chambers has a membership of 5000 – currently 5 co-op members (paid staff, run the bar day-to-day), 5 club collective members (unpaid, elected)

Eleanor presented the conduct policy for WC Club Collective members: applying better organisation to our existing policies,

Grievance and Disciplinary Guidance – was not previously in place. In most organisations, this is a top-down procedure, but Wharf has a flat structure and this policy reflects that. Informal conversation is a first preference.

Wharf does not have a human resources department. WC has been resistant in the past to having a dedicated HR role. Confidentiality has to be respected.

Forthcoming policies – conduct for non-coop bar workers, comments and complaints form for all members, policy on how we deal with disclosures of abuse. These policies make dealing with these issues easier, more efficient, more consistent.

Wharf is currently recruiting – and will be equality monitoring. As with any organisation, this information will remain confidential.

Document is for members as well as co-op/Club Collective members – welcome feedback from members. Please note: it will be a legal document – has to be quite focused in its language.

Brainstorm: *Wharf has a safer spaces policy – what do you think this actually is? Who is it for? What does it do?*

- A policy that is meant to be highlighting ways you can be harmed and the ways that can be dealt with
- Set of standards that says what is accepted in this space
- An agreement of what happens when something is made to feel unsafe
- Safer space – not a safe space – working towards a safe place
- A way of ensuring there isn't one group of people dominating a space, ensuring equality for all
- Safer spaces **agreement** – not a policy, this implies top-down. It's an agreement between members
- By entering the space, you agree to abide by the guidelines that have been set
- Not enforced by any one group or person – empowering members to tell people when they break the agreement – the coop and club collective will support them

Co-op members explained how the Safer spaces agreement works in practice:

- Safer, rather than safe – acknowledging that risk of harm cannot be eradicated entirely
- Discrimination is not always explicit / conscious – your behaviour can be oppressive, no matter your intentions

- Outcomes for people who break the agreement: bans (varying lengths, no lifetime bans – we believe in rehabilitation. Some people have been banned for very long periods of time), have conversations with people in question RE: their behaviour
 - o **Question:** *if someone who breaks the agreement's behaviour is decided to be atypical, does this depend on whether the person is known to co-op/club collective? With a white-majority staff, this will be reflected in who is/isn't banned*
- Details are passed to the club collective who make the decision with the co-op (who are all members of the club collective)
 - o **Question:** *is a ban necessarily going to rehabilitate or is it purely punitive?*
- Person who brings the complaint will always be consulted on what outcome they are comfortable with
- Anyone who is banned will have to reapply, WC will discuss with the person who brought the original complaint, no instant acceptance of membership

Question: *if we were to finish at 8.10, would that be a problem for anyone? Want the time for the Q&A – no objections*

Katherine on her time as part of the Club Collective:

- Joined 8 months ago, liked wharf and wanted it to do better
- Likes that members really care – this doesn't just mean devoting time physically to the space
- Try to educate ourselves on the problems that arise in our communities
- Work in progress, we have made mistakes
- 5000 members, not all of those are going to be active members – which is fine, but we need the participation of active members to help us improve, hold us to account, ask difficult questions
- You can join the club collective by coming to a members meeting where the elections are taking place
- Roles: secretary, chair, treasurer + 4/5 non-office members of club collective – stretched quite thin – we are positively asking people who are interested to get involved
- **Question:** *is there an upper limit on members of club collective?*
 - o The CC were unsure of the answer, but it is in the constitution

- No experience necessary but if you're good with HR, finance, issues with identity – please consider standing for a CC position

Bans & transparency RE: policy

- Punitive aspect of the ban is basically non-existent – primarily to protect the person affected and their access to the space. Giving the person being banned space to reflect.
- This can be discussed/reflected on further as part of a members meeting, members survey

Q&A:

- *What is it that determines an informal chat, what determines a ban?*
 - o Cassie: the main consideration is harm & risk. We are aware that there hasn't been enough comparative work done across the decisions made, as these decisions have been made over the past few years.
 - o Katherine: need to reflect on how we make this as fair as possible
- *How are bans enforced?*
 - o Pat: a ban is usually given to a member by the club collective. Offered a meeting to discuss their ban and why they've been banned. Enforced by people working behind the bar – would be asked to leave or ejected.
- *If someone is banned for racism, how can a white-majority club collective ensure that they will follow the policy properly?*
 - o Danny:
- *Feel there is a brick blocking the discussion, people wearing different hats and having to navigate those identities (woman, black woman, queer etc.)*
- *General lack in the policy of acknowledgement of WC as a club space – it's the busy weekend nights where the pressure is on the bar staff to deal with people breaking the Safer spaces agreement – is there a way for WC to facilitate designated people around to monitor the situation?*
 - o Really short staffed at the moment, but in principal it would be welcome. Currently we can only deal with issues as they are brought to us.
- *How do you enforce bans for non-members? If you don't have their emails?*

- Pat: notes to give to people if they come back in, verbal bans, asking people who may know who they are
- *Processes need self-reflection, especially when discussing racism in a predominantly white space. How can WC encourage this self-reflection as an explicitly anti-racist place? What can WC do to empower people to bring complaints? Being publicly critical is difficult and WC should be helping people to come forward*
 - Cassie: Increasing the ways in which members can get in touch with WC (comments box in the bar for example). We really want people to feedback to us, welcome suggestions for how we can communicate better
 - Katherine: twice a year surveys go into a lot of detail. Have been discussing training in implicit bias etc for new recruits
- *Accountability check in person at a club night (Love Muscle) at WC recently – but this person was aware of it because they know people who work at WC – easier to do so when this is the case. How would we make this person more visible?*
 - Badges? An accessible signifier (hi-vis, big sparkly badge etc)
 - Torches
 - Michael (Love Muscle): we post the picture of the appointed person on Facebook; only able to control who's in the gig room – would like wharf to arrange for someone to fulfil this role in the bar room.
- Issues largely come from non-members arriving at WC when other clubs close – membership checking?
- Designated place online for people to
- Does the disciplinary procedure/safer spaces agreement apply to staff?
 - The new disciplinary procedure covers this – will be available on website and posted on social media once it is agreed.
- Questions from a survivor that will be asked if not already covered in the course of Q&A
 - I didn't know this meeting was happening until being told from someone else a couple of days ago. Why has no-one contacted me to let me know that this meeting is happening or to check in and see how I feel about it happening? Or to ask if I need an advocate present in the space? Especially after wharf now claiming that they'll work on communication and centring survivors needs?
 - Although the perpetrator is apparently no longer working here, what is wharf doing to hold other staff members accountable? Especially the ones who caused the most harm and still to this day refuse to apologise or

engage in conversations about this? How are other members kept safe if these staff members are going on as usual and can continue to cause harm to other survivors and/or people of colour who report similar issues?

- Can wharf admit that the issues outlined in my response was a pattern of things that wharf's staff and club collective did on purpose instead of making excuses? Can they fully own up to this without giving disclaimers?
- Is wharf challenging members who are communicating victim-blaming or abuse apologist views in response to my statement? Is the pressure for me to put my trauma on display (by giving every detail to the public) being challenged by staff members? Is this being recognised as a safety issue? There are staff members who have let this happen and are still actively supporting these views - what's being done about it? Also people who need to know further details already know them and many have ignored them over the last few years.
- Why do they feel now hiring more people of colour after all these failures is the step forward? Considering how many members of colour can notice how the work of addressing racism and abuse has been unfairly put onto staff and members of colour, how has this built any form of trust? What are white staff actually doing personally to make it better for both members and staff/club collective members who are people of colour? Can they confidently say that they will employ PoC in a non-tokenising way?
- Can wharf stop claiming that they weren't sure what to do or were unprepared to work against issues of abuse and racism in their space and among their staff? They had been given plenty of suggestions and ignored many. There are also plenty of resources out there that they could have looked for and shared amongst themselves over the past few years. Can they just admit that dealing with these issues didn't feel important to them?
- What are wharf chambers doing to validate experiences of racism and abuse that they have previously invalidated (as individuals and/or as a collective)? Are they also reflecting back on other instances and recognising past harm?
- What are wharf chambers doing to challenge white members who think their delayed work to tackle racism in the space is more valuable than the years of work people of colour have put in (even though they shouldn't have had to do this)? Do they recognise that seeing PoCs work as having been inadequate in this way is racist in itself and that if wharf staff suddenly choose to listen to white people over people of colour on these issues that that is also racist? What are they doing to compensate and/or credit (if wanted) the work of people of colour who have put so much

unpaid education and suggestions into the space that has been unappreciated for so long?

- Why is releasing a clinical spreadsheet that looks the same as information released 2 years ago an appropriate response to all this?
- Abuse carried out by staff member – how can we make sure this doesn't happen again?
- Pauline: this meeting hopes to answer some of these questions – it is the beginning, not the end.
- Logistics of the meeting: feel that people from Wharf who have been here longer should be talking more, rather than Katherine doing most of the talking
- The issue of racism is not being addressed transparently here – are the co-op and CC actively learning, doing outreach? Will there be a public apology?
- Needs to be visible, public responses to the survivor's questions – following an apology.
- Its 2018, people have the resources to educate themselves – PoC's labour is not free and shouldn't be expected in these situations – really unsettling. White people should be educating themselves and then coming together for these discussions
- Diversity training: how to decolonise, recognise and battle unconscious bias. Self-education is key before coming together and having the conversation
- Danny: on why we think it's appropriate to hire PoC:
 - Feels that his experience as the first trans member of staff helped change the environment of wharf
- Will the survivor's questions be answered by WC?
 - Katherine: do not want to rake up the past for the survivor in public – as they have asked
 - § If the survivor didn't want these questions answered, why did they ask for them to be brought to the meeting?
 - § Cassie: would like to answer all of them but we have to prioritise the active consent of the survivor.
- What do we do to respond to the fact that there are now lots of people who don't feel safe coming to WC?
- Pauline: What do we want to see from wharf?

- A place where these questions can be answered
- Clarification on whether the survivor wants their questions answered publicly.
- What is wharf doing to hold staff members accountable?
 - A lot of work has been done on the new procedures to make them work in a flat structure such as WC
- § Separating from our biases
- Why is Katherine answering the questions when she has only been on the CC for 8 months?
- Suggestion: separate meeting where just these questions are answered?
 - Raino: I don't feel we could answer these questions here and now
- Nobody from the cooperative/Club collective has made a commitment to answering these questions/scheduling a meeting to do so in a timely manner
 - Eleanor volunteers to take this responsibility