Welfare Officer report 12th Jan

Had quite a big development recently in regards to setting some items on my manifesto into motion.

Discussed with Louise Jones before Christmas break about the possibility of having a mental health specialist who can prescribe medication on campus. The reason I had this idea was that at present the university counsellors cannot prescribe medication, meaning students have to get them from a GP, this may be a stranger that they might feel uncomfortable talking to and would have no details of the student's condition unless they were already seeing a GP alongside a counsellor. They may be unsympathetic and GPs can be reluctant to prescribe medication if they do not know your history. It can also be difficult to get a short-notice appointment at the GP's leaving students waiting for the medication they need. St. John's campus is also a much more convenient location for freshers during their first weeks of university, when adapting to new surroundings can cause anxiety and depression, who also may not be familiar with Worcester city centre.

We believe another benefit of this would be that they could communicate directly with the students counsellor if needed, being able to work out a care plan more quickly and efficiently for the student.

Future plans include thinking of ways to actually fund this, or Louise suggested using existing staff, either offering more training or seeing if there is something we can do to improve the current system. There is a GP on university campus, which I was previously unaware of. Louise was going to speak to them and to the mental health department about how the system currently works and get back to me.

We were also discussing how there can sometimes be a wait of two weeks for a counselling appointment. Though the counsellors usually see emergencies, the wait is still long for a student in distress. I proposed the online counselling idea outlined in my manifesto, which would include online counselling by email, a live chat available during the day, and a student-led forum dealing with more minor issues with students offering support to each other to take the burden off of counselling while also developing a caring community. We agreed that the idea was worth looking into more.

We discussed the model for the website, and how this would work with Nightline. With the live chat running during the day (until Nightline opens) there would be 24-hour support available. We are not sure if the live chat option is needed with the development of Nightline but we want to pursue the idea of the email/online counselling service.

I have a brief outline of the estimated costs to set up and run a website and forum. The cost is not high, £150 - £200 a year to run. I could build a simple site, or I have friends who work in the industry who have said they would do it for free or a small fee depending how complicated the job would be.

Future plans: I was supposed to meet Louise a few days ago, but she missed the meeting. I will find out what happened as we had made plans to set things into motion. Also for next council meeting when I have more info I will draft up a proposed model and costs and gain feedback from students on whether this is needed for the university if we (hopefully) decide to develop this further.