

Hello ,

Happy New Year! I hope you all enjoyed the holidays and your 2016 has got off to a great start! I had a very unusual Christmas day in Australia, as I spent the afternoon on the beach! All the sunbathers were wearing Santa hats and the lifeguards had decorated their lifeboats. It was great fun!

It's been a busy January for me as we have been sharing our vision for delivering outstanding Children's Services. I've been speaking with a wide range of staff and partners which has been both interesting and informative. In between now and April, when we'll begin to draft our plans, I'll be speaking to as many young people as possible to ensure that we work together to shape our future.

I'm really looking forwards to spending the day with a young person as part of Takeover Day. She is coming to talk to our social work teams at Watling House with me, to get a sense of what it's like to be a Director of Children's Services. I am hoping she will help me to understand what it's like growing up in Central Bedfordshire and how we can make sure our services deliver the best support.

One highlight of my month was having tea with the young people staying in the Maythorn centre, in Biggleswade. We spent some time chatting about school and home, and listening to music. Maythorn has received a Good Ofsted report so myself and Councillor Hegley took a cake to celebrate. The centre is a credit to the young people who stay there and the staff who support them.

I always enjoy my visits to Watling House, January's visit was as positive as ever. I visited our Customer Services centre and listened in to incoming calls. There is such a wide variety of queries the teams know exactly where to direct calls and there were some very happy customers. From listening to the council's 'front door' I moved on to Children's Services Access and Referral hub, where we also receive a very broad range of enquiries. I was able to discuss some cases with our social workers and referral co-ordinators who are responsible for assessing risk and directing families to the right support at the right time. You may know that our Access and Referral Hub is on course to host police officers from 1st April. This is a very exciting development supporting our partnership working and information sharing.

Finally I would also like to share a meeting I had with social work trainees, who are shadowing colleagues across Children's Social Care. I know some of you are involved in recruiting social workers indeed some of you interviewed me a couple of years ago. If you would like to get involved in interviewing our would-be social workers please just ask Marie how to get involved. It was a pleasure to meet such a keen and dedicated group of students, all driven to have a positive influence on the lives of children. I shared with them something I say many times: There is no more rewarding job in the world than working for Children's Services, making a positive difference to children's lives.

I am enjoying feeding the birds in my garden – do you do that? It is easy to hang up a bag of peanuts and the birds love to come and feed in this cold weather. I have a bird box in my apple tree and a pair of blue tits are looking very interested in it. So I may be able to report a happy bird family nesting in my garden in my next blog.

Best Wishes Sue.