

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, July 23, 2020
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on July 23, 2020 conducted by phone as a result of COVID-19. Prior and Public Notice of the meeting was given in accordance with G.S. 143-318.12.

Board members present for today's meeting were Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman, Ms. Angela Mainor, Mr. Jesse Dowe, and Mr. Gary Ange. Ms. Susan Thigpen, DSS Director, was also present for the meeting. The invocation for today's meeting was given by Ms. Susan Thigpen.

No changes or amendments were added to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

Mr. Gary Ange has accepted a second appointment to the Social Services Board and this appointment has been approved by the Duplin County Commissioners. Mr. Jesse Dowe and Mr. Gary Ange will be making arrangements at a later time for Mr. Ange to take his oath for this position. His previous appointment will remain active per statute until this oath is taken.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Mr. Gary Ange and minutes were approved for the June 25, 2020 meeting.

Old Business

Ms. Angela Mainor indicated that the Employee Survey needs to be done at this time because the agency is still losing employees and she does not believe this can be solely due to salary since people are still leaving during a pandemic. The Board had previously voted on questions for the survey and Board Chairman, Mr. Mike Wallace, planned to send an email out with the survey emphasizing that the information is being requested by the Board and that responses are anonymous. The survey was not sent out as initially planned due to the county being hit with ransomware and employees having no access to their emails. Ms. Susan Thigpen with follow up with Ms. Pam Brame about preparing the survey for release to staff to include a request on behalf of the Board to complete it. The original plan was for Mr. Mike Wallace and Ms. Angela Mainor to attend an agency meeting but these are not occurring at this time due to COVID-19 and the need for social distancing. Results will be discussed during the next Board meeting in August.

New Business

Budget Report – Agency has completed the formal close out for 2019-2020. All expenses except emergencies must be purchased by mid-May so there are no significant changes from last month other than the addition of salary and related expenses and foster care payments for June. The agency did receive funds for the damage caused earlier in the year to the outside light so there was actually a increase in the building repair line item. The agency will be working diligently over the next few months to arrange for the majority of building repairs approved in the 2020-2021 budget since this can more easily be done while the agency has few individuals coming onsite for services.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – The waiver for Food and Nutrition Services was not approved for July so staff is working diligently on recertifications despite the knowledge that the waiver could be extended at some point later in August. Medicaid is currently working on recertifications for August and September and will then begin good faith efforts to review a percentage of all automatic recertifications during the earlier waiver. The units have developed a plan that will allow them to complete this by the end of December. The Income Maintenance units and management continue to place increased focus on second party reviews and timeliness in completing applications and recertifications since this has been an area of need.

Personnel – There are currently 12 vacancies across the agency. We have interviewed and are in the process of filling four Income Maintenance II positions and an Income Maintenance III position. Interviews for the Maintenance, Social Worker III and Social Worker IV positions will be occurring over the next few weeks. The agency continues to utilize a combination of virtual and in-person interviews.

Child and Adult Services – All training for Child and Adult Services for the remainder of 2020 will be done virtually. There has been a significant increase in the number of screened in Child Welfare reports from 29 in May to 43 in June, with a total of 70 open assessments during the month. There were also 14 screened out reports. There are 47 In Home Services cases and 31 children currently in agency custody. The agency was recently able to bring everyone back up on the server so the Child Welfare Department will be better able to monitor caseloads and status of cases after recent data is entered. It has been challenging over the past several months to easily monitor caseload sizes and trends since there was not a master spreadsheet of cases. There are currently no supervisors with backlog cases in their office.

Adult Services has experienced some recent challenges in meeting the needs of adults in need of housing arrangements. Finding a placement in a homeless shelter is difficult due to the requirements for social distancing and one shelter was unwilling to accept someone from Duplin County. Duplin County has no homeless shelters and COVID-19 has created additional burdens for the homeless. Ms. Susan Thigpen continues to partner with community resources to explore options to meet the needs of our homeless population.

Director's Update

The agency continues to have employees that are out as a result of COVID-19 but it does appear to be slowing down. The agency director and county manager have discussed the possibility of allowing clients into the building beginning on August 1, 2020 while limiting their access in the building to offices behind the front desk and a space adjoining the lobby. All neighboring counties are now open to clients while limiting areas that can be accessed by clients. Clients would be assessed for COVID risk factors and temperatures would be taken prior to entering the building. The agency does have five stations that could be utilized to meet with individuals. Staff would still encourage clients to utilize paper copies provided at the front of the building and the drop box to minimize traffic into the agency. Ms. Angela Mainor does not believe the agency is ready to open yet and bringing other people into the agency poses a risk to clients and staff. While acknowledging that the agency needs to open at some time, Board members do not believe now is the time. Mr. Gary Ange made a motion that the agency open to the public whenever the governor moves to Phase 3 on the condition that the county commissioners have approved county offices reopening to the public. This motion was seconded by

Mr. Jesse Dowe and was approved by the Board. Mr. Jesse Dowe indicated that the County Commissioners are discussing the need for reopening county offices on a daily basis and the agency director could confirm with the county manager that the agency can move forward with reopening as soon as the state moves into Phase 3.

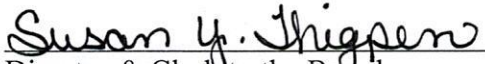
The agency is moving forward with sheltering plans for hurricane season. Selection of staff to man the shelters has included consideration of health challenges for the employee and whether an employee serves as a caretaker for parents, children, or spouses that would be a higher risk of contracting COVID. There will be reduced staff at the shelters as included in the American Red Cross guidelines and social distancing will result in significant decreases in capacity at each of the shelters.

Agency management does have concerns about the impact to employees as a result of remote learning for public schools. This is a challenge being evaluated across the state and will require some flexibility and creativity in ensuring that case requirements are met while also accommodating the special needs of parents and caretakers during this time.

The agency has received information from the NC Department of Health and Human Services regarding the availability of CARES Act funding that will be provided to county DSS agencies to support additional Adult Protective Services and Child Protective Services salary costs. These funds must be spent by 12/30/2020. No specific amount has been released to each county at this time but directors are currently evaluating possible ways to utilize these funds since they cannot be used to supplant current funding streams, cannot be used to pay hazard pay or emergency pay as previously indicated, and can only be used to pay overtime/compensatory time expenditures paid due to staff shortages caused by COVID-19 illness, quarantine, care for COVID positive family members, closed child-care, and closed schools during the eligibility period. Providing verification that any pay for overtime is directly linked to COVID-19 would be virtually impossible.

Motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Mr. Gary Ange and was passed to adjourn the meeting until our next regular scheduled meeting to be held on August 27, 2020 at 8:30. This meeting will be held virtually if the governor extends Phase 2 of the reopen plan or in person if the state opts to move forward with Phase 3. Board members asked that County Manager Davis Brinson and Human Resources Director Pam Brame participate in next month's meeting to provide information regarding the employee survey and the county's policy for handling complaints when allegations of mistreatment are made by employees.


Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: August 27, 2020