

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, September 24, 2020
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on September 24, 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, Ms. Ila Davis, and Mr. Jesse Dowe. 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.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Jesse Dowe and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the August 27, 2020 meeting.

Follow-up Discussion on Employee Engagement Survey

The Board plans to move forward with presenting to the Commissioners during the October 12th meeting regarding the results of the survey. The Board designated Mr. Gary Ange to speak on behalf of the Board but everyone plans to attend. Ms. Susan Thigpen will submit a request to be added to the agenda.

Ms. Susan Thigpen reported on the additional details obtained as requested during the last meeting specific to agency turnover and this agency's salaries as compared to other counties. According to the UNC School of Government Survey, the salary for an IMC I is the 2nd lowest of 91 reporting counties, the salary for a SW II is the 26th lowest of 91 reporting counties, and the interpreter's salary is the 6th lowest of 56 reporting counties.

Board members were provided with a report reflecting agency departures since January 2018. Data specific to 2020 show that of the 31 employees who left the agency 6.5% were terminated, 25.8% went to another DSS agency, 12.9% left for employment at some other agency, 9.7% obtained employment with the school system, 32.3% opted to stay home or had no other job, 3.2% returned to college, and 9.7% retired. Of those obtaining employment at DSS or some other agency (other than the school system), 66.7% of them left for higher salaries. It is also relevant to note that some of the employees that have left in the past year or so to remain at home specifically indicated in an exit conference that continuing to work was not in the best interest of their family when they considered the cost of childcare and their salary. Mr. Jesse Dowe pointed out that Duplin County's salaries are antiquated and have not been studied since 2008 and recommendations were not implemented at that time.

In response to concerns expressed by employees regarding favoritism, respect, and supervisory skills; Ms. Susan Thigpen indicated that she and the management team have developed a tentative plan to include leadership training, re-establishment of the Advisory Committee, and a

UNC Training: Energize and Engage Employees, for management and supervisors. This team will be responsible for developing agency wide strategies for engagement following the training. The agency will also be providing an increased focus on the mission and values for the agency. The Management Team is also developing a more intensive orientation training for new employees that will focus on customer service and managing workplace conflict. This training will also be provided to existing staff in small groups over the next few months. Ms. Angela Mainor expressed concerns about ensuring that training provided to supervisors and management addresses the issue of favoritism, since it was frequently identified as an issue in the survey. Ms. Susan Thigpen noted that these plans are a starting point for addressing concerns. Board members are supportive of exploring all opportunities to enhance supervisory skills and oversight but had no additional ideas or suggestions for addressing these areas at this time.

New Business

Budget Report – The agency continues to work diligently to have repairs made to the building during this time. There is nothing of note with expenditures and revenue as this is early in the budget year. The county's Facilities Coordinator has assumed responsibility for the project to replace the agency's windows and is currently following up with the contractor regarding the job.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – Additional P-EBT benefits will be issued over the next week. The state has not indicated the amount of these benefits but they will be provided only to those families for whom children have been in remote learning for at least 50% of their schooling, which would include all school-aged children in Duplin County. Benefits should be loaded to cards by September 25, 2020 and new cards will be mailed out in early October for anyone who may have lost their card or are new recipients.

There are significant changes to the MOU measures for Child Support in 2020-2021. The 5th goal of meeting the county's goal of total child support collections is being deleted and paternity establishment and support order establishment have been reduced to 50% and current child support collections and arrears collections have been reduced to 40%. These changes have been made to coincide with Federal measures.

CIP applications have gone from 34 in July to 59 in August and is expected to have a larger increase in September. The agency will likely see a greater increase over the next few months as temperatures become cooler and individuals continue to struggle with catching up on power bills that were unpaid during the time services could not be terminated.

Personnel – Turnover continues to be an issue at Duplin County Social Services and there are a number of vacancies at this time. The agency has been able to bring in new staff fairly quickly in Economic Benefits as there have been an adequate pool of qualified applicants at all times due to continuous posting; however, the pool of applicants for Social Worker positions remains limited. There have been 11 new employees hired in August and September.

Child and Adult Services – The agency is continuing to see an increase in homeless adults throughout the county with physical and mental health needs and options for placement are limited. The agency has worked with at least 10 individuals in 2020 that qualified as homeless and were involved with Adult Protective Services. CPS received the largest number of reports in

August since March and expects to see these numbers continue to increase as children return to classroom learning. In reviewing caseload sizes, all In-Home Services workers are currently maintaining caseloads within state standards while some Assessment workers are struggling with completing assessments in a timely manner and have been over the caseload guidelines. Since the number of foster children has remained fairly low, there are nearly two additional full-time equivalents (FTE's) in that unit at this time. The foster care unit has been pulled in to rotate Intake responsibility with Assessment and In-Home Services workers. There are currently five vacancies in Child Welfare and the agency continues to get a small number of applicants for these positions.

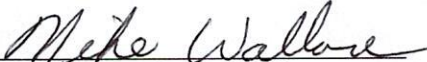
Director's Update

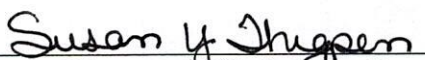
The state has provided some additional guidance regarding the use of CARES Act Funding designated for CPS and APS. These funds cannot be used to supplement salaries or overtime as these units' work schedules have not been directly impacted by COVID. The state has indicated they will continue to consult with counties on options for the use of these funds. The agency is exploring the possibility of implementing a web based case management system, Traverse, with these funds but an additional \$49,000 would be needed for the total costs for 2020-2021 so this may not be an option. The agency is also exploring additional technology to support remote work.

The state has provided a guidebook for DSNAP operations in the event of a disaster. Duplin County Social Services is prepared to manage a drive-by application process similar to COVID testing at the event center in conjunction with the use of ePass and the agency drop box in the event of a declared disaster. Social distancing would be impossible with in-person applications as DSNAP has been handled in the past.

Mt. Calvary Center for Leadership Development, One to One with Youth, and Vidant Health have all been approved to provide support services for individuals needing access to primary medical care and supports as a result of being quarantined or isolated due to COVID-19. Referrals for this program will be made through NCCARE 360. Ms. Susan Thigpen and both program administrators are qualified to make these referrals at this time. Individuals who have tested positive, taken a test and are waiting for the results, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive, or is required to take precautionary measures due to being in a high risk group all qualify for services through a community health worker.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Mr. Jesse Dowe and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on October 22, 2020 at 8:30 a.m.


Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: October 22, 2020