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DEP Releases Report By Booz Allen Hamilton on Bureau of Customer Services

DEP released today the report of Booz Allen Hamilton, a consultant engaged in January to assist DEP in the transformation of its Bureau of Customer Services. Booz Allen Hamilton analyzed all aspects of BCS, including customer service operations, revenue collection methods, organizational structure and existing technology systems. Over the past 18 months, customer services and billing practices have improved significantly, with more robust, accurate and easily accessible information now available to all 826,000 water and sewer account holders throughout the City. In addition, DEP has begun to pilot and implement a new set of collection and enforcement strategies that will increase customer payment rates and recoup past-due revenue from chronically delinquent customers. The report will be available online at www.nyc.gov/dep.

DEP has already begun to implement many of Booz Allen Hamilton's recommendations, including:

Implementing a Payment Incentive Program

DEP has begun sending payment incentive offers to more than 8,000 residential accounts, informing them that their late payment charges will be eliminated if they settle their accounts immediately. Those who do not settle their accounts within 90 days will be scheduled for service termination. The Payment Incentive Program will afford customers with outstanding accounts receivable and a history of billing disputes an opportunity to settle their accounts and avoid serious collection actions. DEP will conduct extensive outreach in conjunction with the Payment Incentive Program to ensure all eligible customers are aware of this one-time opportunity.

Comprehensively overhauling the dispute resolution process

Per BAH's analysis, which revealed existing dispute resolution practices to be inefficient and decentralized, DEP has overhauled the dispute resolution process throughout headquarters and all borough offices. Beginning shortly, specialized customer service representatives will be able to resolve minor customer disputes at the first level of customer contact, either over the phone or in person, and DEP has already implemented an easy-to-use, standardized customer dispute form, available on our website or any of

MORE INFORMATION

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our offices, that will significantly expedite the dispute resolution process. Additionally, DEP is offering certain customers with especially complex disputes the opportunity to discuss their complaints in informal discussions with BCS managers.

Terminating the service of chronically delinquent residential and commercial customers

To collect on past-due arrears and increase future payment rates, DEP has implemented several service termination pilots in the last several months. In September, DEP noticed 21 single-family, residential customers, informing them that their water service would be terminated if they didn't pay a specified portion of their debt within 30 days. All paid within 30 days and no service was terminated. DEP has also launched a commercial shut-off pilot for more than 30 commercial customers who had defaulted on payment agreements. Last Friday, DEP began issuing shut-off notifications under existing Water Board regulations for approximately 2,000 commercial customers with significantly overdue accounts.

Providing more accurate billing information to customers

In pursuit of this goal, DEP will install Automated Meter Reading (AMR) technology for all accounts Citywide beginning June 2008. AMR will allow DEP to decrease the occurrence of estimated bills and provide more accurate billing and consumption information to customers on a more frequent schedule. To take advantage of this more robust customer data, DEP will also be implementing a new Customer Information System (CIS) that will allow for account information to be tracked and managed more effectively and a new customer bill that will communicate this information more clearly and effectively. An interim, re-designed bill is expected in June of 2008, with a final version launched in 2009 to dovetail with the installation of AMR throughout the City. In order to select leading systems, DEP is currently field-testing two potential AMR technologies in 800 homes ahead of Citywide implementation.

Transforming the organizational structure of BCS to increase efficiency and standardize operational procedures

BCS recently overhauled its organizational structure, following the recommendations of Booz Allen Hamilton, to align it more closely with best practices used by other water utilities throughout the country.