

BWSSB'S BOLD DECISION TO ADOPT CUSTOMER CHARTER

When constructing your dream house, do you remember how many days it took for you to get the new water connection sanctioned by the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) without paying a bribe? Or how many days you made your trips to the BWSSB office to get your work done? Do not the days of plumbers taking you for a ride or the BWSSB staff making your life miserable haunt you? Here is the good news for would be customers of BWSSB.

After BMTCL and KPTCL, it is the turn of the BWSSB to adopt its customer charter, the final draft of which is being circulated among the stake holders and voluntary organizations. The BWSSB which was set up in 1964, has taken three and a half decades just to provide information about its activities to its own customers. Nevertheless, it is a good sign that the BWSSB is trying to become more transparent and water user friendly.

The BWSSB has promised that the water supplied by it will be of the standards stipulated by the Central Public Health Engineering and Environmental Organization, and it will seek the participation of the private sector in its mission. Henceforth Bangaloreans can have 24 hours advance notice of any interruption in supply of water in any part of the city.

The BWSSB has taken a bold step in avoiding middlemen. In future, you need not be under the mercy of plumbers, for the BWSSB has agreed to accept application forms for new connections directly from the customers. All you have to do is to apply with necessary documents like road cutting endorsement, tax paid receipt and sanctioned plan issued by BDA/BMP or the local municipality.

Apart from giving the details of the amount to be paid for various services, the charter also gives the timeframe within which BWSSB will deliver the goods. For example, your application for a new water connection will be sanctioned within seven days, provided it is for ground and first floor. There is no reason why it takes fifteen days for the same work, if it is for ground and two floors. If all documents are submitted, there is no need for different timeframes for the same work.

The charter says BWSSB requires two days after receipt of application along with certain documents to attend to leakages and change of bore. Somewhere else in the charter it says that leakages will be attended to on the same day. It is necessary that leakages should be attended to immediately without waiting for formalities. The time frame of two days is too long, considering the allround scarcity of water.

The charter also gives details of tariff as on date and the method of payment. Apart from 65 BWSSB counters, there are 62 branches of State Bank of Mysore authorized to accept payments. Some customers have complained that banks are collecting service charges for accepting BWSSB bills. It is also reported that

payments from customers without saving bank accounts are not being accepted by the banks. This needs urgent attention from BWSSB.

The BWSSB has decided to hold Water Adalats once every month, chaired by concerned executive engineers, to settle disputes connected to water, sanitary, non-receipt of bills, delay in sanctioning connections etc. The success of adalats depends on two factors. First, the details of the meeting should be given wide publicity. Secondly, grievances should be solved or settled on the spot. The BWSSB should build confidence among customers about these adalats. Otherwise, it will be a futile exercise.

Despite all this, the BWSSB does not promise what action it would take if the timeframe is not adhered to. It is not clear whether the frontline staff and the union of workers of the BWSSB are aware of this charter document. Experience elsewhere shows that customer charters have failed for the simple reason that the workers were not consulted.

Normally, a citizen's charter should not be more than two or three pages so that consumers will be able to get a copy free of cost or photocopy it easily. It is not essential that the charter should be loaded with all the information that the service provider has at its disposal. Technical details, particularly, should be avoided. But the charter of BWSSB runs to 21 pages with a maze of technical details. The details of contact addresses itself takes up nine pages. Certainly, the BWSSB cannot distribute this charter free of cost.
