

# Accountants set to review Urbco expenses

By Anna Tam

THREE professionals from the Hong Kong Society of Accountants, Hong Kong Bar Association and Hong Kong Management Association will be invited to form an independent panel to review the Urban Council's allowances system.

The decision was made at Urbco's Standing Committee meeting yesterday.

But the committee decided to postpone a decision on whether to recruit a management consultancy firm to conduct an initial survey and analysis for the independent commission.

Councillors said they did not have information on the budget for such a scheme and were not yet in a position to decide.

However, the members of the independent commission will work on an honorary basis, as a service to the community.

Urbco decided to examine its allowances system in November, after it awarded members a 10 per cent rise in allowances, to \$44,000 a month.

Last month, a working group recommended a four-member commission with representatives from the three professional bodies plus the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (CSS).

This option, however, was rejected at yesterday's meeting. A majority of councillors agreed that the CSS was not a relevant body to conduct a review of the allowances system.

Councillor Joseph Chan Yuek-sut expressed further reservations.

He said the CSS was an organisation which had many social obligations and did voluntary work and might have a tendency to regard Urbco councillors' work as merely a civic duty.

The committee agreed on the odd-numbered panel because councillors thought it would

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facilitate the voting process, avoiding deadlock.

Councillors were also concerned that the professional bodies might not accept the invitation.

"If it was only our wish, then it would be very odd," Mr Wong Hon-ching said.

Asked by *The Hongkong Standard* yesterday whether it would accept the invitation, the Bar Association said it could not decide without knowing the terms and conditions.

The final decision would be made by its council.

A spokesman for the Society of Accountants said it made sense to have a professional accountant for the issue and it "welcomed the opportunity to make the nomination".

The Management Association said it accepted the invitation "in principle".

Council members were also concerned about co-ordination between Urbco and the Regional Council.

Szeto Wah urged Urbco to cooperate with Regco over the allowances system review.

"It would be better to have a common decision in reviewing the allowances system. If there was a difference (between Urbco and Regco in terms of allowances), it would cause differentiation in the society and that would be bad," he said.

Urbco chairman Ronald Leung Ding-bong said Urbco would seek to exchange views and communicate with Regco.