

L. A. M. P.

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Boost Urbco's powers — club

The Reform Club yesterday called for a dramatic increase in the power of the Urban Council so that it has complete control of the Housing Authority and public housing.

It also wants the council to have much greater control over "everyday matters" such as education, medical and dental services, transport, social welfare and fire services.

Changes would have to be made to the council's management structure to bring control of the additional matters under the one umbrella, the chairman of the club's

electoral sub-committee, Mr Brook Bernacchi, said.

He said the organisation of public housing is unsatisfactory.

The people, most affected by the matter, are left completely in the dark.

At present, closed book meetings are held behind closed doors.

Although eight members of the Urban Council are represented on the Housing Authority, they have no control, he said.

"We must bring pressure on the authority so that the council regains control of

public housing.

"The Legislative Council already has enough on its plate.

"The Urban Council can more adequately consider the public's requirements."

In a meeting to introduce the club's candidates, Mr Bernacchi said the Legislative Council must also be reformed so that people from all walks of life have some form of direct representation.

"At present there is no representation of the actual working person," he said.

"For a start, two elected seats in the council should be

created."

He attacked the Government's electoral system for the small amount of interest in Urban Council elections.

Residents of five years or more who are over 18 years old should be automatically registered, he believes.

"There are 30,000 names on the current voting list and yet the biggest turnout on election day in the last 10 years has been 10,000," he said.

"This means that two-thirds of the voters fail to turn up."

However, he predicts that

the coming elections on March 8 will see a bigger turnout than in recent years.

This is because of recent controversy in the council which sparked public interest, combined with a new register.

"Everyone on the new register requested that his name appear which should mean that they are all interested in voting.

"The power of the council would be greatly increased if it had more public support."

The three Reform Club candidates, Mr Francis Chaine, Mr Frank Knight and Miss Cecilia Yeung Lai-yin, outlined their platforms for the coming elections.

Generally, they said they would support the club's stance, which includes reform in the taxation system to bring it up to date with English law, housing reforms, education changes to make the system more balanced, improved medical services and more facilities for training doctors and mandatory licences for hawkers.

Mr Knight suggested a fleet of mobile dental clinics — "perhaps 20 or 30 donated by the Royal Hongkong Jockey Club" — be established and a greater emphasis on recreational facilities and the protection of Chinese customs, including an improvement in Chinese New Year entertainment.

"This could include a fireworks display over the harbour," he said.