

Rap across knuckle for all-powerful Rose

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ANGRY investors in Marks & Spencer gave the iconic high street retailer a rap on the knuckles yesterday over plans to keep its controversial management regime in place for up to two years.

More than a third of the 125-year-old firm's shareholders backed a motion at its annual meeting calling on executive chairman Sir Stuart Rose to stand down next July, rather than by July 2011 as M&S had proposed.

The clothing, food and homewares group is also planning to appoint a new chief executive next year.

M&S has been under fire from some investors since May last year, when it allowed Rose to combine the roles of chairman and chief executive against corporate governance guidelines.

Ian Greenwood, of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum which tabled the rebel motion, said he believed Sir Stuart had done a good job but M&S was risking its reputation by sticking to its management-succession plan.

He said: "We're pleased a large number of shareholders supported us. This is a clear message to the company." Rose said after the meeting that the company needed more time to appoint a suitable successor, saying: "We have to go along with what we think is right."

About 1,900 M&S shareholders attended the good-humoured but sometimes heated gathering at London's Royal Festival Hall, where they were offered an array of the company's famous sandwiches and other specialities, washed down with wines from Portugal and South Africa and traditional beers.

Questioning tackled issues ranging from poor signs and the cleanliness of toilets in stores to complaints about staffing shortages and poor availability of some shoe colours and sizes.