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# 22,000 households face rent increase

MORE than 22,000 households in six public housing estates will be affected by rent increases in April. Rents will go up by \$2.25 per square metre, and 86 per cent of the affected tenants will have to pay an extra \$62 to \$97.

The increases will apply to 22,140 flats at Choihung, Fukloi, Matauwai, Pingshek, Wahfu (Phase IV) and Wolok estates.

A spokesman for the Housing Authority said the increases were necessary to meet rising maintenance and improvement costs as well as increases in rates over the past two years.

The Housing Authority has absorbed for these tenants \$7.2 million in rates and has not passed on to them revised rates until the latest review.

Moreover, \$9 million has been spent over the past two years on the upgrading of electricity supply, re-roofing, installation of communal aerial broadcasting distribution and piped gas systems in most of the estates.

The new rent levels will remain at \$12.37 to \$12.88 a square metre, which will be less than 10 per cent of the tenants' income.

This revision was made after the completion of a biennial rent review for the six estates.

A Kowloon City District Board member criticised that the 21 to 29 per cent increase was too high for Matauwai estate as it was 20 years old.

He made the comment yesterday at a Housing Authority meeting to explain to members of five district

boards and mutual aid committees the rent revision for these estates.

The member said though it was a small sum in money terms, taking into account the weak purchasing power of Hongkong people these days, the level of such increase would definitely affect the livelihood of tenants.

However, a Housing Authority spokesman said one should not just look at the percentage of increase, as the rents at Matauwai were still low. Moreover, the authority had spent \$90 on each household last year for maintenance.

Another board member from Tsunwan suggested that the Housing Authority should revise rents each year, to be in line with the annual salary adjustments. But this was turned down by the Housing

Authority as it would cause management problems.

Meanwhile, a group of Lamin Estate residents urged the government to let tenants having an average density of 3.25 square metres to apply for rehousing.

In petitioning Umelco yesterday, the group also requested that tenants could have a density of 4.8 square metres after re-allocation.

Its spokesman, Mr Lee Ting-kit, said it was a retrograde move by the Housing Department to introduce the new policy last November, stating that only tenants occupying less than 2.23 square metres could apply for rehousing.

He said they understood that the move was introduced to make way for two-member families and single tenants to obtain public housing.