

Effective Complaint Handling for Strata Residential Property Managers

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Abstract: As Malaysia's cities grow taller, more people are living in strata properties such as apartments and condominiums. Yet managing these shared communities remains challenging, especially when handling resident complaints effectively and fairly.

This book explores how complaint management in Malaysia's strata housing can be improved. Based on data analysis, interviews, case studies, and international comparisons, it develops a practical, research-based Complaint Handling Framework for property managers, Joint Management Bodies (JMBs), and Management Corporations (MCs).

Readers will gain:

- A clear overview of strata living and Malaysia's regulatory framework.
- Insights into common types of complaints, supported by a Klang Valley case study.
- Clarification of the roles of developers, JMBs, and MCs under existing laws and regulations.
- An overview of current management practices and technology tools used in the industry.
- Key findings from surveys, site visits, and focus group discussions highlighting real operational gaps.
- Lessons from international best practices, including examples from Singapore and Hong Kong.
- Practical tools such as step-by-step complaint processes, models, and guideline templates.

With the help of diagrams, summaries, and clear comparisons, this book gives practitioners and policymakers both an overall understanding and practical guide for change. It provides a clear and forward-looking framework to help Malaysia develop strata communities that are efficient, transparent, and truly liveable supported by responsible and accountable management.

Keywords: Complaint handling, strata, framework, management



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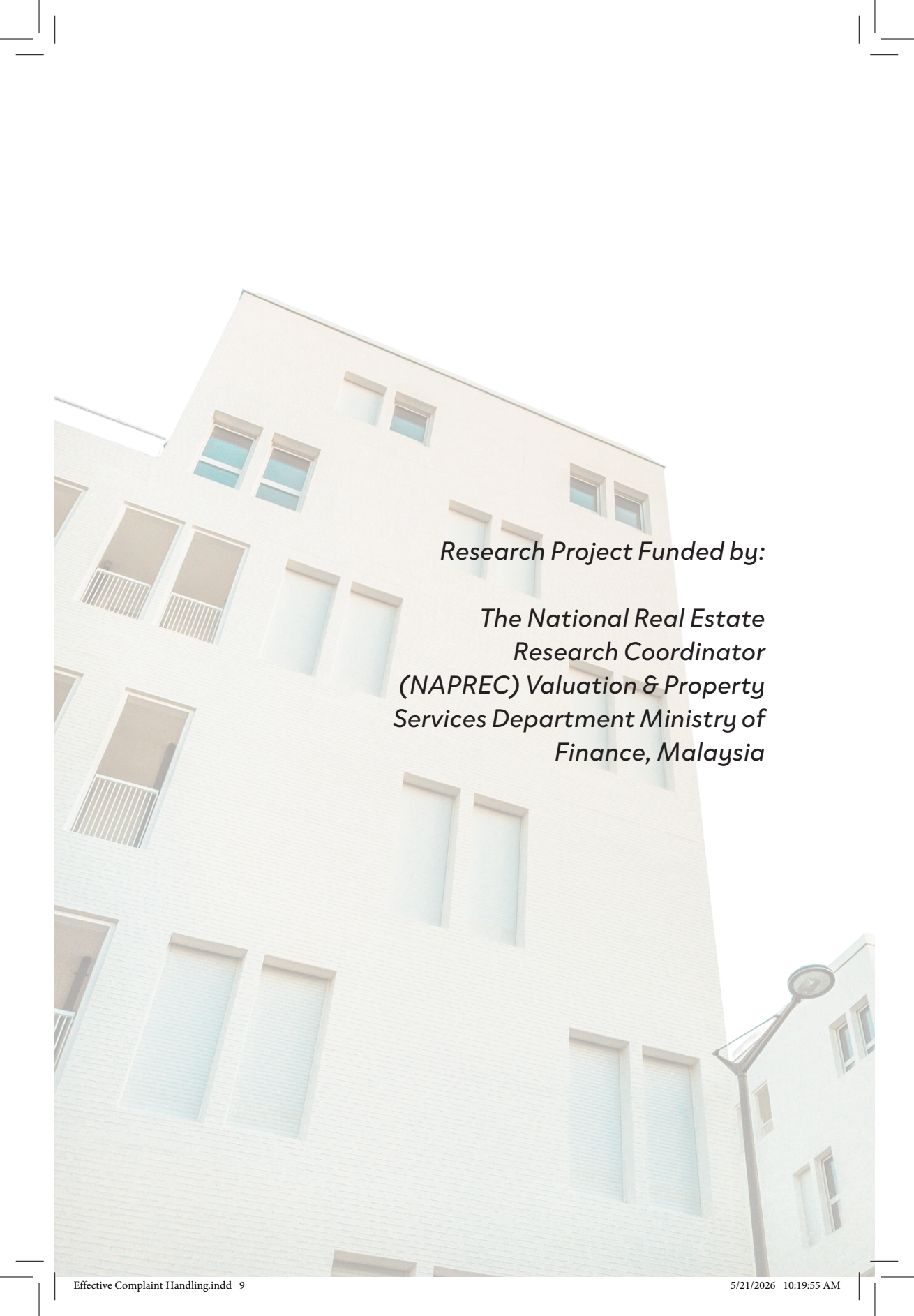
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PREFACE

Malaysia's urban landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. As cities expand vertically, strata living has become an integral part of everyday life for millions of residents across Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, and the broader Klang Valley. Complaints about strata management—often reflecting concerns about safety, service quality, transparency, and financial stewardship—have emerged as one of the clearest indicators of the gaps between expectations and actual performance in strata schemes.

This book was conceived in response to these widening gaps. It presents a comprehensive, evidence-based exploration of complaint handling in strata residential property management, drawing on the analysis of complaint records, fieldwork, interviews with practitioners and policymakers, benchmarking with international markets, and structured case studies. Through this multi-pronged approach, the authors aim to provide both scholarly insight and practical guidance for strengthening the management of Malaysia's strata communities.

Beginning with an Introduction to Strata Living and Property Management in Malaysia, the book walks readers through the evolution of the sector and the regulatory framework that governs it. These foundations are necessary for understanding how responsibilities are distributed across key actors, namely Joint Management Bodies (JMBs) and Management Corporations (MCs), as set out in the Third

Schedule of the Strata Management Act and the Strata Management (Maintenance & Management) Regulations 2015.

The chapters that follow delve into the nature, categories, and patterns of complaints in strata schemes, drawing on national datasets and insights from a case study in the Klang Valley. Readers will also find comparative analyses of complaint categories, common classifications, and the results of questionnaires and site visits involving local authorities and property managers.

In exploring current practices, the book examines technological tools and emerging trends, including a feature comparison of property management applications in Malaysia, apps used for complaint handling, and the operational steps involved in digital complaint management. To provide a benchmark for professional standards, quality management principles were reviewed within the context of strata property management. Internationally recognised guidelines also guide the systematic development of a context-specific complaint-handling model suited to Malaysia's regulatory and cultural environment.

Through a dedicated section on data analysis, findings, and lessons learned, the book synthesises insights from multiple sources—including comparative rankings of complaint categories, site visit findings, and practitioners' experiences—to enable a deeper understanding of systemic issues. This is followed by an examination of best practices, both locally and from international strata management markets, offering readers a global perspective on what effective complaint handling looks like in high-density residential environments. Central to the book is its presentation of the Complaint Handling Guideline Framework, developed through rigorous conceptualisation and validated through a final Focus Group Discussion (FGD) comprising industry experts, policymakers, and practitioners.

Ultimately, this book is intended as both a diagnostic and a roadmap. It is written for property managers and managing agents seeking to professionalise their practices; for JMB and MC members navigating

statutory duties; for policymakers and regulators shaping the future of strata governance; and for researchers and students studying urban governance, dispute resolution, and property management.

The authors acknowledge with gratitude the support of the Ministry of Finance through the NAPREC research grant, administered by the Department of Valuation and Property Services. Appreciation is extended to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Development (KPKT), local authorities such as Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), Majlis Bandaraya Subang Jaya (MBSJ), and Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), local industry experts, and international specialists from Hong Kong and Singapore for their invaluable contributions.

We hope that this book will contribute meaningfully to strengthening strata management practices in Malaysia and inspire the management of strata communities that would be the foundation for liveable urban developments.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Strata Living and Property Management in Malaysia

1.1 Introduction

Malaysia's rapid urbanisation over the past few decades has significantly transformed the nation's residential landscape. With increasing urban migration and limited land availability in key urban centres such as Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Penang, high-rise residential buildings have emerged as a dominant form of housing. The concept of strata living, which refers to multi-unit developments where individual ownership is combined with shared ownership of common property, has become a preferred choice for urban dwellers.

This chapter introduces the context and relevance of strata living in Malaysia. It highlights the essential role of property management in ensuring the effective operation and sustainability of these residential schemes. It sets the foundation for understanding the complexity and importance of complaint handling in managing strata residential properties.

1.2 Growth of Strata Development in Malaysia

Urban growth in Malaysia, as in many other Asian countries, has been rapid in recent years. It has been said that the rate of urbanisation in Malaysia is rising. The rate has tripled over five decades, from 28.4% in 1970 to 75.1% in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2022). The urban population is projected to continue growing, with an estimated 79.8% residing in urban areas by the end of 2025. The latest

CHAPTER 2

Regulatory Framework for Strata Property Management in Malaysia

2.1 Introduction

The legal and regulatory framework for strata property management in Malaysia has evolved significantly over the past four decades in response to urbanisation, population density, and the increasing popularity of high-rise living. The need for a robust legal structure arises from the unique nature of strata schemes, where multiple owners share common property, responsibilities, and obligations. This chapter outlines the development of the legal framework, key statutory instruments, institutional mechanisms, and current regulatory challenges in ensuring effective governance of strata properties.

2.2 Background

In the provision of management services for strata properties, stakeholders are required to provide management and maintenance services for the common area, as provided by Malaysian legislation. The laws governing strata management are the Strata Management Act 2013 (SMA), the Strata Management (Maintenance and Management) Regulations 2015 (SMR), the Strata Management (Tribunal) Regulations 2015 (SMTR), and the Strata Management (Compounding of Offences) Regulations 2019 (SMC). The SMA is read and construed with the Strata Titles Act 1985 (STA); so far, the provisions of the STA are not inconsistent with the SMA and its regulations.

CHAPTER 3

Complaints in Strata Schemes: Nature, Categories, and Current Practices

3.1 Introduction

In the context of strata property management, complaint handling is not merely an administrative function; it is a strategic component of community management that reflects the quality, responsiveness, and accountability of managing bodies, such as the Joint Management Body (JMB) or the Management Corporation (MC). Given the communal nature of strata living, where residents share facilities, boundaries, and governance, disputes and dissatisfaction are inevitable. Effective complaint handling provides a mechanism to address grievances fairly and promptly, thereby maintaining harmony within the community.

Research has shown that efficient complaint management enhances trust between residents and the management body, contributing to a more cohesive residential environment (Bordes & Chen, 2018). When complaints are acknowledged and resolved constructively, residents are more likely to feel heard and respected, reducing tensions and fostering long-term cooperation (Jones & Smith, 2020). Moreover, data from complaint records can serve as an early warning system, flagging recurrent issues that may point to systemic weaknesses in property maintenance, security, or communication.

CHAPTER 4

Benchmarking Complaint Handling Management: A Guide for Strata Property Managers

4.1 Introduction

Building on the understanding of complaint categories and current practices in Malaysian strata property management, this chapter explores global best practices in complaint handling through benchmarking exercises. It also discusses how the ISO 10002 standard on complaints management provides a comprehensive framework for quality-driven, resident-centred service delivery. These insights are then used to inform the development of a practical, standardised complaint-handling framework suited to the Malaysian context.

In any service-oriented profession, including property management, handling complaints effectively is essential. Residents expect their concerns to be taken seriously, resolved fairly and responded to promptly. To support this, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) developed ISO 10002:2018, which provides clear guidelines for how organisations should manage customer complaints.

This standard is not a law, but it is widely used around the world as a best-practice framework. It can be beneficial for strata property managers who deal with multiple stakeholders and a wide variety of service-related issues.

CHAPTER 5

Case Study Schemes

5.1 Overview of the Case Study Approach

This chapter presents a case study aimed at developing a complaint-handling guideline for property managers. The case study approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of real-world practices, challenges, and contextual factors influencing complaint management in property management settings. As Creswell (2014) highlights, a case study enables researchers to investigate a bounded system, such as an organisation, process, or event, through detailed, in-depth data collection across multiple sources. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation rather than relying solely on isolated data or theoretical assumptions.

In line with Yin's (2014) conceptualisation, this study adopts a systematic and objective methodological design to ensure rigour throughout the research process. Multiple sources of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, were utilised to construct a robust and credible analysis. These included questionnaires, audits of existing procedures, interviews, and observations of complaint-handling practices. Such triangulation not only enhances the validity of the findings but also supports a deeper understanding of the contextual realities that property managers face.

The case study was guided by a postpositivist stance, acknowledging that while complete objectivity may be unattainable, careful methodological design and reflexivity can strengthen the credibility

CHAPTER 6

Data Analysis, Findings, and Lesson Learned

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis derived from the data collected in accordance with the three research objectives outlined in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the empirical results and provide a comprehensive understanding of the complaint-handling practices among property managers and relevant stakeholders within the context of strata property management. The data analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a balanced, in-depth examination of the research outcomes.

6.2 Identification of the categories of complaints for property management

The first section addresses Objective 1, which focuses on identifying the categories of complaints commonly encountered in strata property management. The results from the questionnaire survey are analysed to highlight the types, frequencies, and nature of complaints reported by property managers. The questionnaire survey was self-distributed to property managers of strata buildings across the Klang Valley case study area, encompassing the local authorities of Majlis Bandaraya Subang Jaya (MBSJ), Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), and Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL). In addition to physical distribution, respondents were contacted through telephone and email invitations to ensure broader participation.

CHAPTER 7

Best Practices in Complaint Handling

7.1 Introduction

Handling complaints in the strata property management is not just an operational requirement; it is one of the pillars of nurturing trust, adherence to regulations, and improving community harmony. Experience in international literature and cases suggests that effective complaint management must be professional, transparent, and considerate, grounded in established systems and professional norms.

Best practice is described as a procedure or practice that has demonstrated excellent outcomes through experience and experimentation and is utilised as a standard (Kerzner, 2019, p. 87). In property and facility management, best practice is a systematic process of maximising performance, compliance, and stakeholder satisfaction (Johnson & Clark, 2016). It is essential to integrate best practices in handling complaints to facilitate consistent service delivery, enhance accountability, and minimise reputational risks for property managers. Complaint handling based on established, tested standards, including communication, documentation, and responsiveness, is beneficial for building trust with residents, reducing the likelihood of conflict, and facilitating the future sustainability of strata governance (Phang, 2020; Nguyen, 2021).

The best practices outlined in this chapter focus on SOPs, communication, record-keeping, technology adoption, and professionalism.

CHAPTER 8

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

8.1 Introduction

Effective complaint handling is not only a management priority but also a pillar of sustainable governance within strata residential communities. In Malaysia, some of the most prevalent complaints include delays in maintenance, poor management of sinking funds, a lack of transparency, and personal conflicts between residents and management committees. These problems can point to structural flaws in skills, governance systems, and enforcement (Chua & Lim, 2020; Ting, 2019).

This chapter also proposes policy and practice recommendations at three important tiers: property managers, Joint Management Bodies (JMBs)/Management Corporations (MCs), and regulatory authorities. A multi-tiered approach will enable Malaysia to address its existing deficiencies and ensure its strata governance aligns with global best practices. These proposals will be strengthened by comparative insights from Singapore, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Hong Kong, and Canada.

8.2 Recommendations for Property Managers

8.2.1 Establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

One recurring issue in Malaysia is the absence of consistent, documented SOPs for complaint handling, leading to delays and inconsistent responses (Husin & Haron, 2019). Property managers

CHAPTER 9

Moving Forward - A Complaint Handling Framework for Residential Strata Property Managers

9.1 Introduction

Having reviewed best practices from mature markets globally and consolidated the findings from the earlier objectives, the Complaint Handling Framework was developed during the final Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The process assists in verifying and validating the draft SOP and KPI for handling complaints to be used as a guide by property managers in Malaysia. This chapter summarises the findings of the data collection process for the development of the framework.

9.2 Identification of categories of complaints

The earlier stage of the development of the framework had identified sixteen (16) categories of complaint for residential strata property management among the three (3) selected local authority areas with the highest number of complaints, namely Majlis Bandaraya Subang Jaya, Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya, and Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur. It is found that sixteen (16) categories of complaint for property management have been identified, which include counselling, maintenance and upkeep, carpark, meeting, others, health, safety, security & environment, administration and management, customer service, contract management, finance, emergency preparedness & business continuity, waste management, communication, visitor management, quality assurance and management office.

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Sr Yasmin Mohd Adnan is currently an Honorary Professor with the Department of Real Estate, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya. She served in the Department of Real Estate from 2001 until her retirement. Before joining the University of Malaya, she had several years of professional experience in the real estate sector, including at a property consulting company, a financial institution, Petronas Hartabina, and KLCC Urusharta. She is a registered valuer, estate agent and property manager with the Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents, Property Managers, Malaysia and is also a professional fellow and ordinary member of the Royal Institution of Surveyors Malaysia, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, UK and the Malaysia Institution of Property and Facility Managers, Malaysia. In addition, she was a board member of the Pacific Rim Real Estate Society.

Dr Zarita is a senior lecturer with 25 years of experience in education. She has a PhD focused on property asset management in the built environment and is recognised as an expert in her field. Throughout her career, Zarita has been involved in research, consultancy, teaching, and speaking at seminars and training sessions. She is passionate about property asset management and has made important contributions to improving knowledge and practices in the industry. In addition to her work achievements, Zarita is friendly and approachable, making her a great mentor and role model for those starting in the field. She is dedicated to helping her students and colleagues, providing them with support and guidance.



Sr Abdul Ghani Sarip is a lecturer in the Department of Real Estate at Universiti Malaya. He holds a Master's degree in Geoinformatics from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. His areas of specialisation include property valuation and management, land economics, and geographic information systems (GIS). Before joining academia, Abdul Ghani had been in private practice as a valuation assistant and building executive. This industry experience has informed his approach to real estate education and research. His research interests include AVMs, valuation and pricing in real estate, housing economics and property management. Abdul Ghani also serves as an examiner for professional certification examinations and as a reviewer for several international peer-reviewed journals, thus contributing to professional standards and academic discourse in the real estate field.

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- Key findings from surveys, site visits, and focus group discussions highlighting real operational gaps.
- Lessons from international best practices, including examples from Singapore and Hong Kong.
- Practical tools such as step-by-step complaint processes, models, and guideline templates.

With the help of diagrams, summaries, and clear comparisons, this book gives practitioners and policymakers both an overall understanding and practical guidance to improve service delivery. More than just a reference, this book serves as a practical guide for change. It provides a clear and forward-looking framework to help Malaysia develop strata communities that are efficient, transparent, and truly liveable—supported by responsible and accountable management.



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