



# Press Distribution Review Panel Annual Report 2023

## Executive summary

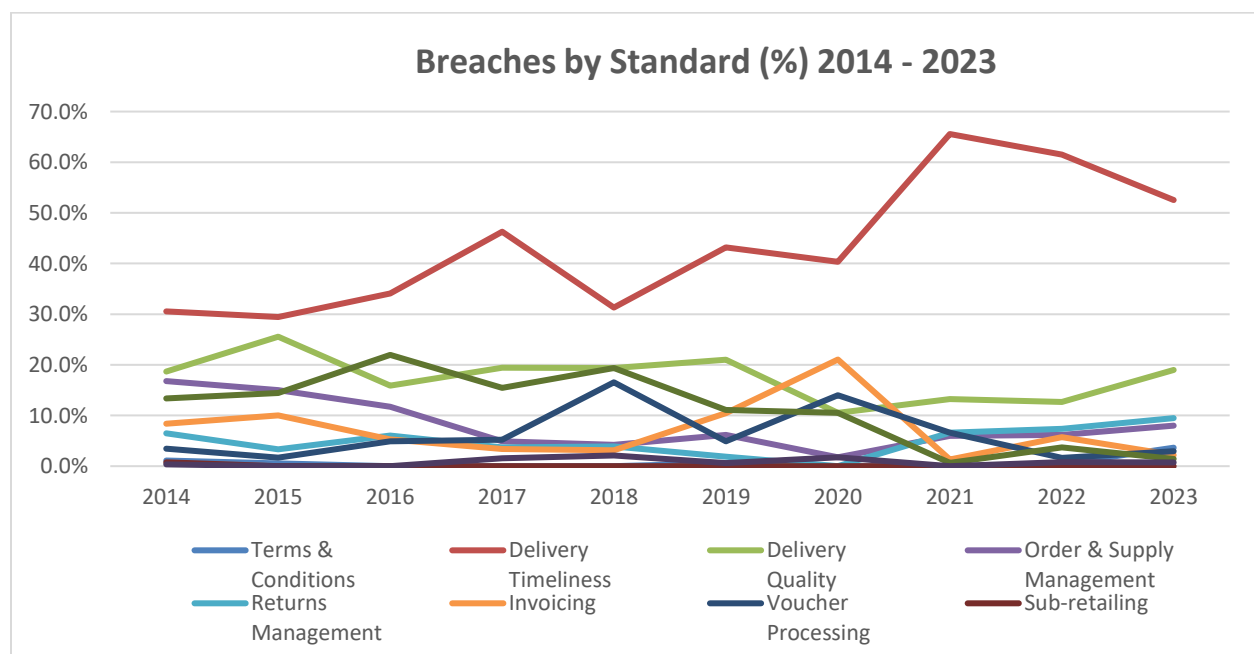
During 2023 we saw a decrease in the overall volumes of formal retailer complaints. If we exclude 2020, which was impacted by lockdown, the level of formal complaints in the year was the lowest level recorded since 2014. This is against the backdrop of on ongoing supply chain challenges but also it is important to recognise that the number of news retailers has reduced by over 20% since 2014.

Whilst the level of complaints had decreased the PDRP remained committed to improving the process and undertook an online survey to those retailers that had made a formal complaint. The responses provided useful insightful with positives and areas where the complaints process may benefit from changes. One of the key highlights from the respondents was that in 61.3% of cases, complaints were upheld, and corrective or remedial action was taken.

In total there 137 breaches to PDF service standards and 11 complaints escalated to Stage 2 Arbitration.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Wholesale houses originating complaints</b>	n/a	n/a	40	34	47	40	27	40	44	29
<b>Number of completed Stage 2 forms</b>	159	117	167	289	283	153	54	135	207	105
<b>Number of Stage 2 Breaches</b>	262	180	264	324	284	162	57	151	244	137
<b>No of complaints escalated to Stage 2</b>	n/a	15	9	22	41	13	3	6	8	11

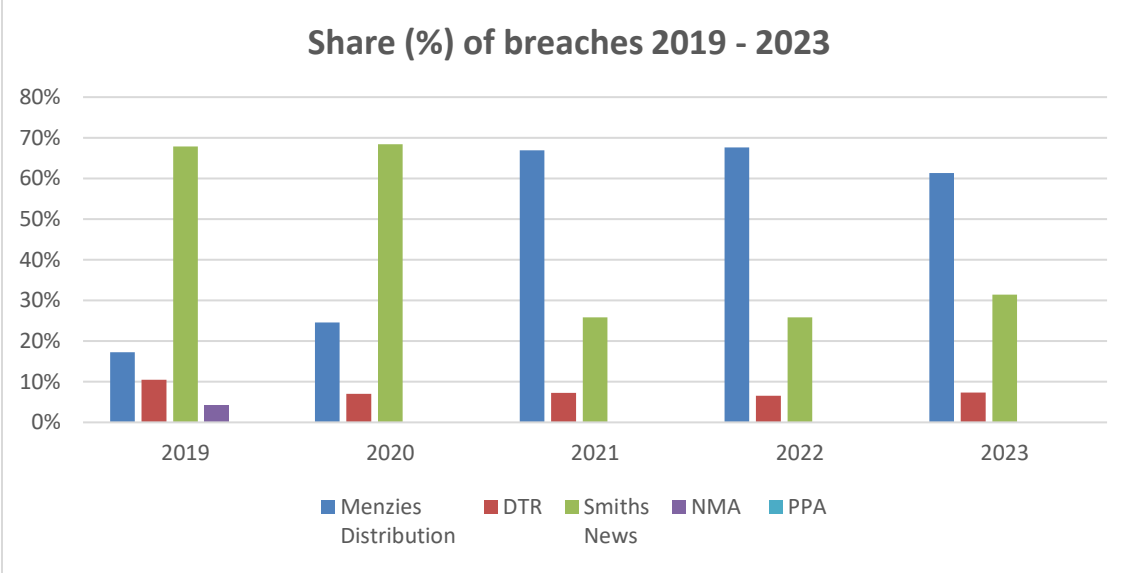
The chart below shows the % share of all formal complaints by Standard since 2014.



Again, the highest proportion of complaints relate to Delivery Timeliness which despite reducing its share remains the dominant cause of breaches to PDF standards.

**Complaints by Association / Wholesaler**

The chart below shows the share of complaints by from 2019 to 2023.

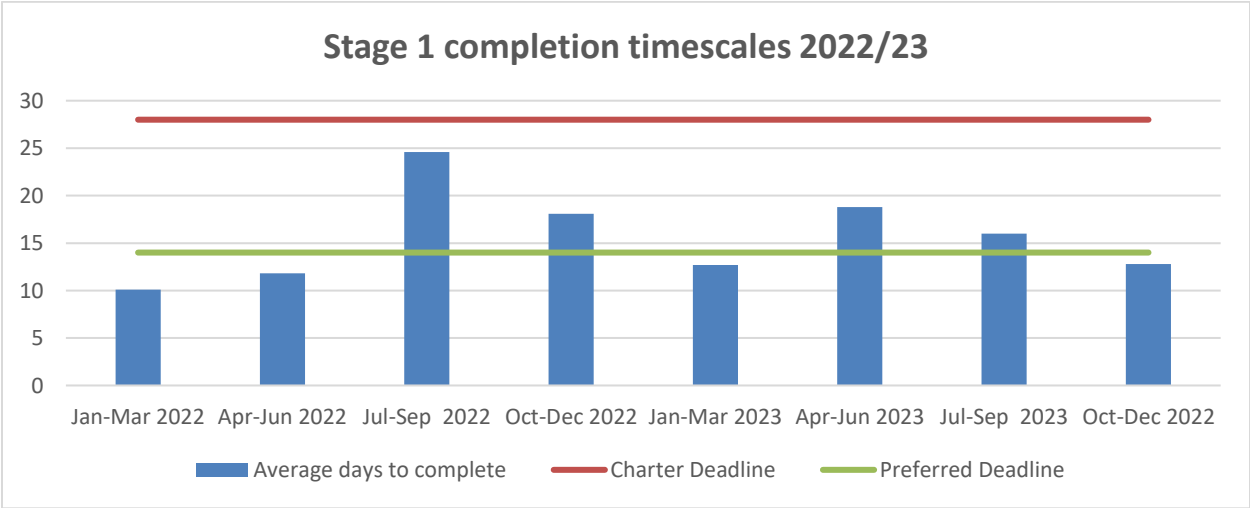


In terms of overall complaints for 2023, Menzies had the highest share with 61%, whilst there were no complaints from NMA or PPA. Interestingly tracking the share of complaints over a 5-year period shows the shift between the two major wholesalers. Smith News historically had the greater share of formal complaints until 2021 when Menzies share significantly increased.

During November 2023 News UK ceased its DTR operation and all products are now supplied via the two major wholesalers.

**Timescale to resolve complaints.**

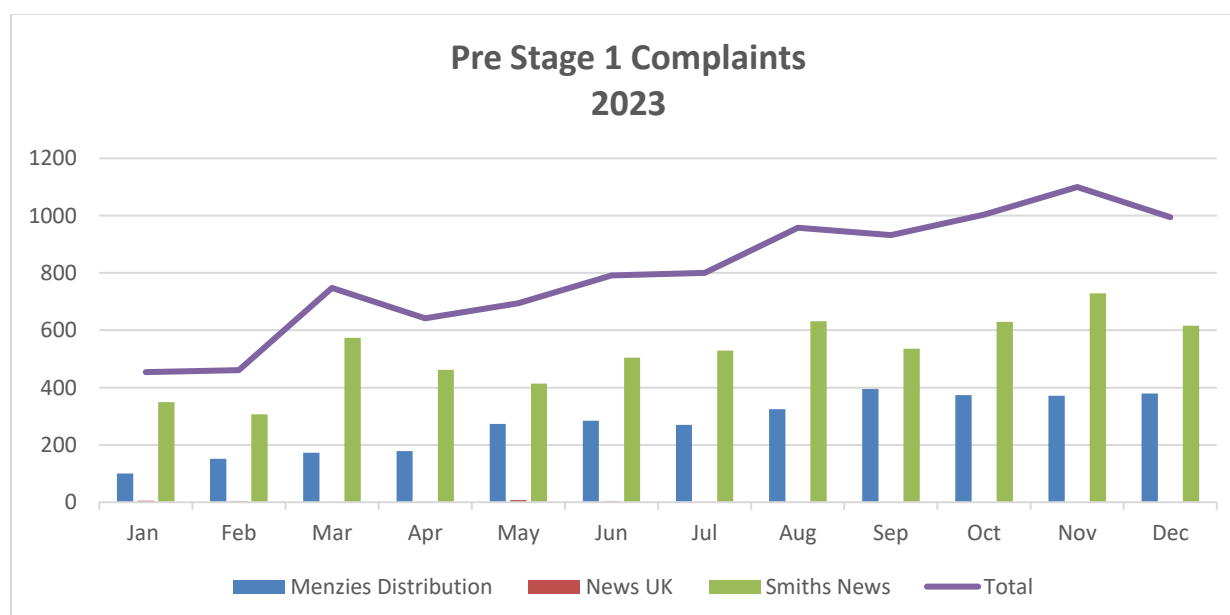
Recent analysis of complaints by Quarter since 2022 (below) shows that the average time to conclude a complaint is well within 28-day deadline. Whilst these results are encouraging efforts continue to ensure complaints are resolved within the preferred 14-day deadline.



## Pre-Stage 1 formal complaints.

Wholesalers continue to provide details of retailer complaints raised prior to formal escalation and during 2023 there were a total of 9,579 informal complaints.

		2023 Complaints pre Stage 1													
Wholesaler	Retailers	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	% Total
Menzies Distribution		100	151	173	178	273	284	270	325	395	374	371	379	3,273	
News UK		5	3	1	2	7	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	24	
Smiths News		349	307	574	462	414	504	529	632	536	630	729	616	6,282	
<b>Total</b>	46,143	454	461	748	642	694	791	800	958	932	1004	1100	995	9,579	0.21



If we look at this compared to 2022.

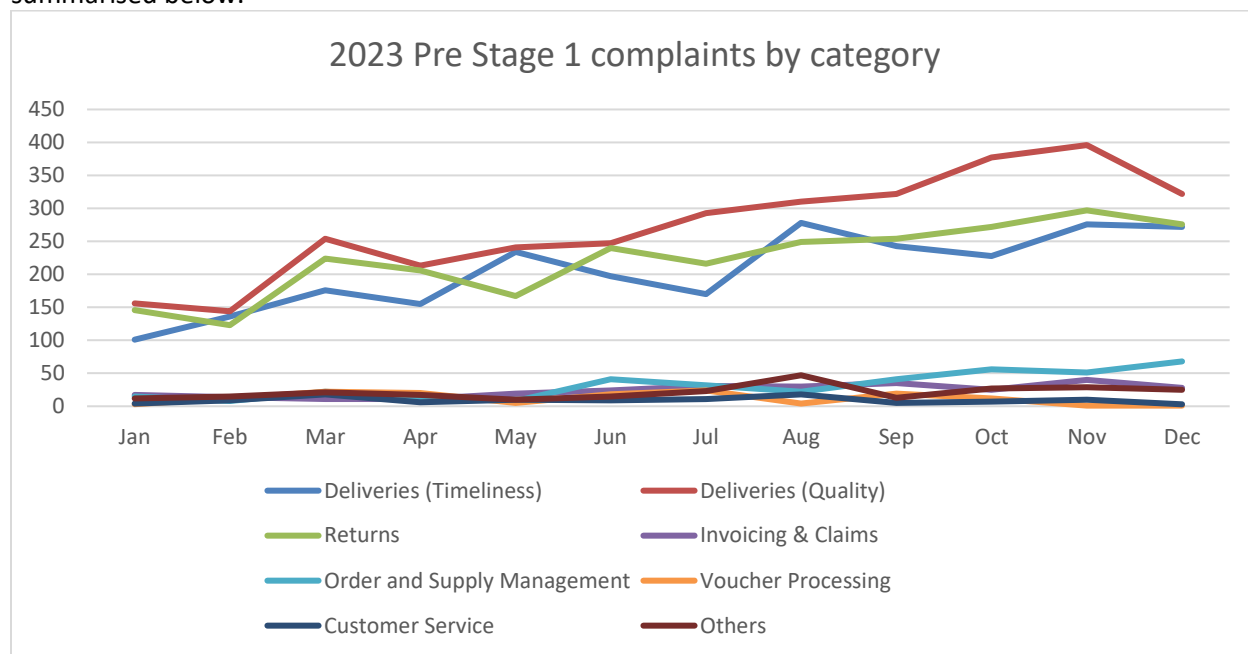
		2022 Complaints pre Stage 1													
Wholesaler	Retailers	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	% Total
Menzies Distribution		224	197	281	260	204	199	272	209	183	158	115	124	2,426	
News UK		5	17	7	4	8	9	7	4	11	13	7	1	93	
Smiths News		274	309	327	289	331	312	367	558	492	421	457	427	4,560	
<b>Total</b>	46,143	503	523	615	553	543	520	646	771	686	592	579	552	7,079	0.15

		2023 Complaints pre Stage 1													
Wholesaler	Retailers	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	% Total
Menzies Distribution		100	151	173	178	273	284	270	325	395	374	371	379	3,273	
News UK		5	3	1	2	7	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	24	
Smiths News		349	307	574	462	414	504	529	632	536	630	729	616	6,282	
<b>Total</b>	46,143	454	461	748	642	694	791	800	958	932	1004	1100	995	9,579	0.21

Overall, there was a significant 35% increase in pre formal complaints in 2023 compared to 2022 which is a concern.

## Consolidated Pre-Stage 1 complaints 2023.

The PDRP continues to consolidate pre-Stage 1 complaints into generic categories, which are summarised below.



Generic category 2023	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	FY	% YTD	YoY %
Deliveries (Timeliness)	101	136	176	155	234	197	170	278	243	228	276	272	2466	26%	20%
Deliveries (Quality)	156	144	254	213	241	247	293	310	322	377	396	322	3275	34%	54%
Returns	146	123	224	206	167	240	216	249	254	272	297	276	2670	28%	34%
Invoicing & Claims	17	14	11	11	19	24	31	30	35	25	40	28	285	3%	-23%
Order and Supply Management	15	8	22	14	8	41	32	22	41	56	51	68	378	4%	101%
Voucher Processing	3	12	22	20	5	18	24	4	19	12	1	1	141	1%	147%
Customer Service	4	9	18	6	10	9	11	18	5	7	10	3	110	1%	-4%
Others	12	15	21	17	10	15	23	47	13	27	29	25	254	3%	32%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>748</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>791</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>958</b>	<b>932</b>	<b>1004</b>	<b>1100</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>9579</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35%</b>

The dominant categories are delivery related accounting for 60% of informal complaints during 2022, we also saw a significant increase in Returns related complaints, which will be a consequence of delivery issues.

Wholesaler Investigations into the reasons for the increase reveal a range of factors rather than any specific cause these include:

- Local dynamics which can impact delivery times and staffing issues.
- During the last quarter of 2023 there was a significant increase in the number of calls into the call centres driven by seasonal weather-related issues, which would naturally trigger an increase in complaints.
- There has been a focus from the industry in simplifying the complaints process for retailers and there can be duplicated cases which has increased volumes. This has created data management issues which can cause challenges when analysing informal complaint trends and resolution.

Through the PDF and PDRP both wholesalers are firmly committed to resolving issues before they become formal complaints.

It is important to again recognise that the level of informal and formal complaints as a proportion of total supply chain activities that could trigger service failures does remain low.

Again, it is interesting to note that despite similar retail universes, Menzies (as mentioned) has significantly higher proportion of formal complaints (61%) whilst Smiths News has the dominant share of informal complaints (66%).

## Retail Delivery Time (RDT) Performance

Despite delivery related issues remaining a concern, the agreed industry metric, Retail Delivery Times (RDTs), showed a slight overall improvement in performance of 0.8% in 2023 Vs 2022, as the table below demonstrates. Whilst this is positive, continued adherence to agreed delivery standards remains important.

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Average
2022	92.4%	91.5%	91.4%	92.0%	92.6%	92.9%	91.3%	90.8%	85.1%	91.8%	91.5%	90.1%	91.1%
2023	93.0%	93.4%	92.0%	92.4%	92.7%	93.1%	93.5%	91.2%	90.9%	90.7%	91.3%	89.5%	92.0%
YoY	0.6%	1.9%	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	2.1%	0.3%	5.8%	-1.0%	-0.1%	-0.5%	0.8%
2022 Benchmark	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	91.1%	

Notes:

During September 2022, the RDTs dropped below expectation due to the news agenda.

During October 2023, the RDTs dropped below expectation due to severe red weather warnings.

## Retail survey

During 2023 the PDRP undertook an on-line survey in which retailers that had made a formal complaint were invited to give their views.

From the survey has identified areas where the complaints process may be improved for retailers, and these include:

- Increasing the overall awareness of the complaints process.
- Understanding why some complaints take longer to be resolved than others.
- To further review and identify trends in the complaints received.
- Ensuring retailers are kept better informed whilst a complaint is resolved.
- Placing greater focus on the resolution of reoccurring issues.
- Reviewing our help guidelines so that retailers can present their best case.

To date there has been good progress against the key outputs from the survey and several plans are in place to improve the complaints process to the benefit of retailers. The survey will be repeated during Q1 2024.

The PDRP remains fully committed to reporting compliance to service standards and positively supporting the supply chain to identify solutions to the benefit of retailers.

As chair of the PDRP I would like to thank the PRDP members, the PDRP Administrator, PDF Administrator, and Arbitrator for their input and support over 2023.

*Performance (Summary) data is summarised from page 7 to 10 of this report. and includes history of breaches by standard, association, and timeliness. Details of breaches by wholesale location are in Appendix 1.*

## Summary Data

This data summarises the PDRP's monitoring of the PDC and its complaints process and provides transparency of performance against key measures of delivery and customer service.

### 1. Full year comparisons including breakdown by standards.

The table below shows total forms completed, breaches, Stage 2 arbitrations, and breaches by Standard by full year 2014 – 2023.

Year	Forms	Breaches	Stage 2	Standard									
				Terms & Conditions	Delivery Timeliness	Delivery Quality	Order & Supply Mgt	Returns Mgt	Invoicing	Voucher Processing	Sub-retailing	Customer Service	Carriage Charges
2014	159	262	n/a	3	80	49	44	17	22	9	2	35	1
2015	117	180	15	1	53	46	27	6	18	3	0	26	0
2016	167	264	9	0	90	42	31	16	14	13	0	58	0
2017	289	324	22	0	150	63	16	12	11	17	0	50	5
2018	283	284	41	0	89	55	12	11	9	47	0	55	6
2019	153	162	3	1	70	34	10	3	17	8	0	18	1
2020	54	57	3	0	23	6	1	0	12	8	0	6	1
2021	135	151	6	0	99	20	9	10	2	10	0	1	0
2022	207	244	8	1	150	31	15	18	14	4	0	9	2
2023	105	137	11	5	72	26	11	13	3	4	0	2	1
<b>All years</b>	1669	2065	118	11	876	372	176	106	122	123	2	260	17
<b>All years %</b>				0.5%	42.4%	18.0%	8.5%	5.1%	5.9%	6.0%	0.1%	12.6%	0.8%

The table below shows the share (%) of all Stage 1 complaints by category.

Year	Terms & Conditions	Delivery Timeliness	Delivery Quality	Order & Supply Management	Returns Management	Invoicing	Voucher Processing	Sub-retailing	Customer Service	Carriage Charges
2014	1.1%	30.5%	18.7%	16.8%	6.5%	8.4%	3.4%	0.8%	13.4%	0.4%
2015	0.6%	29.4%	25.6%	15.0%	3.3%	10.0%	1.7%	0.0%	14.4%	0.0%
2016	0.0%	34.1%	15.9%	11.7%	6.1%	5.3%	4.9%	0.0%	22.0%	0.0%
2017	0.0%	46.3%	19.4%	4.9%	3.7%	3.4%	5.2%	0.0%	15.4%	1.5%
2018	0.0%	31.3%	19.4%	4.2%	3.9%	3.2%	16.5%	0.0%	19.4%	2.1%
2019	0.6%	43.2%	21.0%	6.2%	1.9%	10.5%	4.9%	0.0%	11.1%	0.6%
2020	0.0%	40.4%	10.5%	1.8%	0.0%	21.1%	14.0%	0.0%	10.5%	1.8%
2021	0.0%	65.6%	13.2%	6.0%	6.6%	1.3%	6.6%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
2022	0.4%	61.5%	12.7%	6.1%	7.4%	5.7%	1.6%	0.0%	3.7%	0.8%
2023	3.6%	52.6%	19.0%	8.0%	9.5%	2.2%	2.9%	0.0%	1.5%	0.7%
<b>All years</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>42.4%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>

## 2. Full year breaches by Wholesaler / Association

	Association	Standard										
		Terms & Conditions	Delivery Timeliness	Delivery Quality	Order & Supply Mgt	Returns Mgt	Invoicing	Voucher Processing	Sub-	Customer Service	Carriage Charges	Total
<b>2023</b>	Menzies	2	52	16	5	2	2	3	0	1	1	84
	News UK/DTR	2	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
	Smiths News	1	15	10	3	11	1	1	0	1	0	43
	NMA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	PPA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>2022</b>	Menzies	0	114	14	8	12	6	4	0	6	1	165
	News UK/DTR	0	12	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
	Smiths News	1	24	17	3	6	8	0	0	3	1	63
	NMA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	PPA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>244</b>

## 3. Timeliness of completion of Stage 1 complaints

**2023**

Wholesaler/Publisher	Number of Complaints	Not completed in 28 days	Average time for completion (days)
DTR London	10	2	20.9
Menzies Distribution	84	8	16.6
Smiths News	43	1	14.1

**2022**

Wholesaler/Publisher	Number of Complaints	Not completed in 28 days	Average time for completion (days)
DTR London	16	3	34.8*
Menzies Distribution	165	22	17.8
Smiths News	63	1	9.6

\*Impacted by Oct-Dec online issues distorting the average, excluding which is 11.1 days



## Appendix 1: 2023 Breaches by wholesale location

Wholesale Location	Standard										Total
	Terms & Conditions	Delivery Timeliness	Delivery Quality	Order & Supply	Returns Management	Invoicing	Voucher Processing	Sub-retailing	Customer Service	Carriage Charges	
Barnstaple			1								1
Birmingham		1	3		2						6
Chester		6	1								7
Crawley				1		1					2
Croydon		1									1
DTR London	2	5		3							10
Dundee		1									1
Eastbourne		3									3
Grays							1				1
Hornsey					1						1
Ipswich		1									1
Linwood	1	6									7
Milton Keynes					1						1
Newbridge		4	1								5
Newcastle		3									3
Newport	1	8	1		3						13
Plymouth							1				1
Preston		2	1								3
SEL		3	1	1	1						6
Sheffield		8	4	2					1	1	16
Slough					1						1
Southampton				1	1				1		3
Stevenage		1	1	1							3
Stockport			2								2
Stockton		7	4	1							12
Wakefield	1	9	3	1	1	2	1				18
Wednesbury			1		1						2
Yeovil		1	1		1						3
York		2	1				1				4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>137</b>

## 2022 Breaches by wholesale location

Wholesale Location	Standard										Total
	Terms & Conditions	Delivery Timeliness	Delivery Quality	Order & Supply Management	Returns Management	Invoicing	Voucher Processing	Sub-retailing	Customer Service	Carriage Charges	
Ashford	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Berwick	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Birmingham	0	2	4	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	9
Bristol Total	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Camberley	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chester	0	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	8
Crawley	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Croydon	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
DTR London	0	12	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Dundee	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Eastbourne	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
Gloucester	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grays	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Hemel Hempsted	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hornsey	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	6
Hull	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ipswich	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Kendal	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	5
Lancing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Leicester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Linwood	0	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	14
Liverpool	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Maidstone	0	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	6
Newbridge	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6
Newmarket	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Newport	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Nottingham	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Portsmouth	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Preston	0	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	12
Reading	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ryde	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
SEL	0	11	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	14
Sheffield	0	13	1	1	4	2	0	0	1	0	22
Slough	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Southampton	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Stevenage	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Stockport	0	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	8
Stockton	0	6	5	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	16
Stoke	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Swindon	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Wakefield	0	21	1	3	2	0	1	0	1	0	29
Wednesbury	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Yeovil	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
York	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>244</b>

## **Appendix 2: Governance**

The Press Distribution Review Panel (PDRP) was established to:

- a. Encourage compliance with the Press Distribution Charter (PDC).
- b. Provide comment on compliance issues.
- c. Ensure continuity of arbitration decisions.
- d. Provide an ongoing mechanism for the identification of trends.
- e. Collect, audit, and publish data on compliance.

The Charter is backed by a free, fair, fast, and reliable complaints process which covers most non-commercial aspects of newspaper and magazine distribution. If a retailer has a complaint about a serious or persistent failure to achieve a PDC standard, there are a number of options that can be used to start the complaints process.

The complaints process is a process that puts great emphasis on resolving issues locally yet provides a final independent arbitration.

The PDC provides a simple, 2-step process that enables a retailer to raise any issue on agreed standards and have it resolved efficiently as follows:

Initially it is recommended that the retailer attempts to resolve the issue informally by discussion with the wholesaler.

Stage 1 – If the issue remains unresolved informally, the retailer should contact the company it believes is responsible for the service failure, complete or download a complaint form and return as guided.

Stage 2 – If unsatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 or it has not been completed by the wholesaler within a reasonable time, the PDF Administrator can ask to refer the complaint to an independent Arbitrator for final adjudication.

### **Membership of the Press Distribution Review Panel 2022**

The PDRP members for the year under review were:

Anya Ahmad and Kaleigh Phillips-Marshall (Smiths News)  
Ayk Tahir (NMA)  
Brian Murphy (NFRN/ Independent Retailer)  
Fiona Campbell and Gillian Scott (Menzies Distribution)  
Graham Read (Independent Retailer)  
Paresh Vyas (Independent Retailer)  
Trevor Hudson (PPA)  
Steve Cripwell (Independent Chairperson)

Linda Windsor (PDRP Administrator)  
Mark Farris (PDF Administrator)

### **Independent Arbitrator**

Neil Robinson