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Introduction: Making a difference for transport users

Transport Focus is the independent, consumer watchdog for Britain's rail passengers, bus, coach and tram passengers in England (outside of London) and, for the first time, users of England's Strategic Road Network (SRN). We aim to make a difference for transport users and be useful to those in government and the transport industry who make major decisions about services and infrastructure. We use evidence to drive change for the better.

The Government has asked us, as part of their road reforms package, to take on representing the views of users of the SRN. This is a big, exciting challenge which we were delighted to accept. We do not take a view on how people should travel. We all use buses, cars, trains and other ways of getting around. Many of the themes, such as disruption management, are similar across the modes. We will represent freight users, as users of the SRN, for the first time.

Our existing remit, to represent Britain's rail users and England's (outside London) bus, coach and tram passengers, remains.

Our Bus Passenger Survey is a highly successful product. Now funded two thirds by the bus industry and local authorities, we are reaching some 47,000 passengers a year. We aim to exceed that number this year. The National Rail Passenger Survey, an Official Statistic, continues to be the key measure of passenger satisfaction, and is now embedded in franchise contracts, bonus schemes and other places. For both these surveys we are looking at how we can speed up reporting, develop online questionnaires and reach more passengers. We will continue to help rail passengers who have complained and reached stalemate. We will be developing new road user research methods.

We have successfully put the issue of passenger trust on the rail industry's agenda. The basics of daily performance are the key to building that trust, and we are looking at shifting the emphasis of some of our rail work to reflect this. Over the last few years we have produced research and survey work looking at all the core issues facing passengers: performance, disruption, fares, ticket machines and other areas. The passenger view is well known. However, the glacial pace of change in the industry continues to be frustrating despite the fact that welcome long-term investment continues. We are seeing if we can shift the emphasis to audit, to better pinpoint strong and weak performance, and more progress reports, in an attempt to bring about change.

This year

Seven key objectives will feature large in our work this year. They have been chosen because, building on previous years' work, they allow us to make a difference for the greatest number of transport users and those users whose needs are greatest.

Key objective: use our Bus Punctuality Project to refocus the bus industry, local government and Traffic Commissioners on the needs of passengers, including road shows on our research

Key objective: identify road users' priorities, and work with Highways England to improve their experiences

Key objective: strengthen the passenger voice in rail franchise replacement and monitoring

Key objective: boost the voice of of bus passengers, through bus passenger priorities research and through reaching 50,000 passengers in the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS)

Key objective: enhance the usefulness and value for money of the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), and other surveys, through new research methods, ensuring they continue to be fit for purpose for years to come

Key objective: promote the voice of road users, trialling new research methods with a view to developing a satisfaction survey for the future

Key objective: handle cases where rail companies and passengers are deadlocked following a complaint, and gather intelligence to inform other areas of our work. We will achieve over 70% satisfaction with the way we handle complaints

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

Aim 1: work to improve the transport user experience

Key objectives

- use our Bus Punctuality Project to refocus the bus industry, local government and Traffic Commissioners on the needs of passengers, including road shows on our research
- identify road users' priorities, and work with Highways England to improve their experiences

Bus passengers

Influencing change

The results of the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) are becoming increasingly important in driving improvements in the bus industry. As more passengers are surveyed and more areas covered, the survey is becoming increasingly respected as *the* benchmarking product across the industry. We will use this to get an ever wider reach, helping bus operators and authorities to use this evidence to prioritise improvements for passengers.

Pressure on local authorities' and operators' resources means that services are under threat. One potential solution in some areas has been to move towards a more demand-responsive approach to rural bus services. Last year we looked into the effectiveness of this approach, and this year we will use the results to help communities find their own solutions.

This year we will:

- use our Bus Punctuality Project to refocus the bus industry, local government and Traffic Commissioners, including road shows on our research and the Traffic Commissioners' guidance
- use our work on demand-responsive transport to identify solutions to bus service cuts
- work with Passenger Transport Executives and local authorities to improve bus passenger services
- encourage bus operators to value BPS results and see them as an important measure of their success and of their customers' feedback on areas to improve
- work with operators with low scores to develop an action plan to improve.

Road users

This is our first year representing users of England's Strategic Road Network (SRN). We need to understand what the key issues that road users want to see improved, and use these to influence improvements.

This year we will:

- publish initial qualitative research work on road users' experiences of the SRN. Use research to commence discussions with Highways Agency about policies and operations
- identify road user priorities
- Use research published on at least one road user priority identified and use results to make a difference for road users

Rail passengers

Service quality

We know from the NRPS that the way delays are dealt with is one of the biggest drivers of rail passenger dissatisfaction. So over the years we have done much work on how passengers feel disruption is dealt with and how train companies and Network Rail can improve. This has led to improvements, mirrored in the NRPS, but there is still more work to be done.

Overcrowding is an increasingly big issue for passengers, and some train companies have started looking at ways they can publicise how busy they expect each train to be, in order to encourage passengers to choose a less busy service.

This year we will:

- work with operators to improve passengers' experiences during disruption by publishing and using reports looking into winter resilience and extreme weather, communicating suicides on the railway and keeping passengers informed during engineering work (for example at Bath Station)
- investigate initiatives to improve understanding of and tackle overcrowding, and promote best practice
- encourage Train Operating Companies (TOCs) to value NRPS results and see them as an important measure of their success and of their customers' feedback on areas to improve
- work with TOCs with low scores to develop action plan to improve.

Fares, ticketing and value for money

Previous research has shown that some passengers find the fares system difficult to understand and sometimes worry they might not have the right ticket even if they do. Passengers do not trust the system.

This year we will:

- highlight passenger 'value for money' perceptions, and respond to Government policy regarding fares and ticketing
- work with operators to improve ticket retailing, including smartcards
- work with ORR on its retail market study and proposed ticket information code of practice.

Passenger rights

We work hard to promote the rights of fare-paying passengers, and to increase passengers' awareness of their entitlements.

This year we will:

- look into the suitability of compensation regimes for season ticket holders who endure persistent delays
- encourage greater transparency of performance data
- conduct research into how best to protect passenger rights, and feed the results into DfT's review of the role of the Passenger's Charter
- ensure the passenger voice is heard in policy consultations – for example on revisions to the National Rail Conditions of Carriage.

Aim 2: make a difference for transport users through long-term planning

Key objectives

- strengthen the passenger voice in rail franchise replacement and monitoring

Rail passengers

Influencing the specification and content of new contracts represents a major opportunity to secure benefits for passengers. Consequently, franchising is a key theme in our work plan.

Our input into franchising makes extensive use of the NRPS and draws on other research. Where possible we commission specific research to explore passengers' views of their current experience and aspirations for each franchise.

We work closely with the DfT and devolved bodies in the early stages of developing a new franchise specification and generally provide an initial written submission for each franchise and for proposed direct awards. We encourage passenger feedback in the consultation process and publish our own response to the consultation. We continue to discuss passenger aspirations and priorities with prospective bidders and newly-appointed franchisees to encourage passenger-focused policies.

This year we will:

- strengthen the passenger voice in rail franchise replacement and monitoring – in particular Northern, TransPennine Express, East Anglia and Intercity West Coast
- continue the HS2 Passenger Panel
- increase the passenger voice in the next High-Level Output Strategy (HLOS) 2019-24 – in particular punctuality targets.

Road users

The first Road Investment Strategy (RIS) was published in December 2014, providing funding certainty to the new Highways England, to allow a more structured approach to long-term planning.

This year we will:

- use road user evidence to understand how we can influence the second RIS.

Bus passengers

Industry long-term planning

Much debate takes place about the best way to organise bus services: allow the private sector to get on with it, partnerships between operators and local authorities, or more formal franchise-type arrangements.

Transport Focus does not take a view on structures (and nor do passengers) – we focus on the outputs. However, given the potential impact of some of these structural changes we will, as we do with rail franchising, put forward the passenger view.

This year we will:

- work to ensure any revised regulation of bus services focuses on improving the things that matter most to passengers.

Cross-modal

Transport devolution

The political consensus around devolving powers for transport has gathered momentum. It is important that Transport Focus contributes to their development. We will ensure transport users' views are incorporated as plans develop, and that their satisfaction is then monitored on an ongoing basis. We will also have concern for those passengers who may lose out.

- ensure any devolution in administering and delivering transport services focuses on improving the things that matter to users.

Aim 3: understand the needs of transport users

Key objectives

- boost the voice of of bus passengers, through bus passenger priorities research and through reaching 50,000 passengers via the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS)
- enhance the usefulness and value for money of the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), and other surveys, through new research methods, ensuring they continue to be fit for purpose for years to come
- promote the voice of road users, trialling new research methods with a view to developing a satisfaction survey for the future.

Bus passengers

Last year we conducted research into passengers' trust in the rail industry. We plan to do the same this year for bus passengers. This will allow us to understand their relationship with bus operators, and to see where general perceptions differ from real-time journey experiences.

This year we will:

- increase the size and scope of the Bus Passenger Survey
- carry out bus passenger priorities research
- consider lessons from NRPS review in relation to BPS
- investigate effectiveness of demand responsive transport as compared with scheduled services
- publish research enabling us to better understand passengers' trust in the bus industry
- working with industry and Welsh Government to promote and develop the commissioning of a bus passenger survey in Wales.

Rail passengers

The NRPS has been running for over 13 years and is the world's largest piece of continuous, published rail passenger satisfaction research. The evidence it provides has a multitude of uses including targets in franchises, industry personnel remuneration schemes, judging passenger satisfaction with Network Rail-managed stations and, most importantly, driving change in the industry for passengers.

However, this diverse usage means that the survey is being used for far more than it was originally designed. We will investigate options for modernising the survey to make it simpler, more accessible, more versatile and better value for money.

This year we will:

- publish autumn and spring National Rail Passenger Survey – including more route-based NRPS data, at-a-glance charts and open data on our website
- boost the usefulness and value for money of the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) through new research methods, taking into account stakeholders' views of how the survey could be improved
- publish research looking into passengers' views on punctuality and performance
- improve transparency levels on rail performance data.

Road users

For the first time, we represent users of the Strategic Road Network. We will start by picking up existing tools in understanding users' opinions and experiences from DfT, before using these, and some road user priorities research, to help shape our own, new products.

This year we will:

- publish our initial qualitative exploration of road user opinions and experiences
- conduct research to understand user priorities
- conclude and publish a road user research methodology study, and discuss with stakeholders
- trial new research methods with a view to developing a new satisfaction survey for the future.
- develop pilots of new technology based survey methodologies

Tram passengers

Tram passenger survey

The Tram Passenger Survey (TPS) has now been running for two years. The ability to compare the various tram networks and contrast that experience with bus and rail passenger journeys is increasingly providing us with useful evidence.

This year we will:

- use the results from the first and second TPS to drive improvements for passengers
- repeat the TPS, and secure a longer-term funding model
- secure buy-in from more areas.

Coach passengers

Coach passenger survey

Our initial focus group work with coach passengers indicated high levels of satisfaction. Some issues around personal security, luggage and information were raised but these were in the context of very positive comments overall. However, in order to form a baseline and to aid comparison with long-distance rail services we would like to carry out a coach passenger satisfaction survey.

This year we will:

- carry out a coach passenger satisfaction survey
- present it to the industry and discuss any issues of concern highlighted in the survey results

Cross-modal

As our research increasingly covers a range of modes in the same areas, we can start to produce regional reports of passenger satisfaction covering rail, bus and tram journeys.

Smart ticketing

Smart and integrated ticket products, delivered in a variety of ways, have the potential to significantly improve the passenger experience. London and the Oyster card have shown what can be done.

However, the way forward for smart ticketing outside London is not so straightforward. We are keen to ensure debates about future improvements are centred on passengers. The DfT agrees with us and is providing additional funding to carry out a substantial programme of research on passengers and smart ticketing.

This year we will:

- produce regional, cross-modal satisfaction reports where possible
- continue to develop the Smart Ticketing programme, including
 - publish research looking at passenger issues surrounding ticket innovation
 - promote the views of passengers in the South East Flexible Ticketing scheme
 - publish our report on the c2c Smart Ticketing pilot
 - publish reports on local smart ticketing bus pilots, for example Brighton and Hove and Norfolk
 - prioritise the interests of passengers in the Smart Ticketing for Wales scheme

Aim 4: promote good practice in complaints handling and providing advice and advocacy

Key objective

- handle cases where rail companies and passengers are deadlocked following a complaint, and gather intelligence to inform other areas of our work. We will achieve over 70% satisfaction with the way we deal with cases

Rail passengers

Complaints handling

Transport Focus is proud to hold a statutory duty to consider ‘representations’ from passengers. This role includes mediating in complaints when rail passengers and train companies have become deadlocked.

As well as resolving issues for individual passengers, our complaints work also informs us about the quality of train company complaint handling processes. It can highlight particular areas of good practice that can be shared with other train companies, or can identify issues that we can then investigate further. Our focus on how passengers without ‘valid’ tickets are treated stemmed from this work.

We will continue to devote significant resource to this work and help train companies to improve their processes. Passengers often come to us frustrated and irritated. We measure how those passengers rate our handling of their issues.

In addition, we will look at how we communicate with passengers and how they get in touch with us. We will make our service simpler, more accessible and better value for money. We will work to become the new Alternative Dispute Resolution certified body for the rail industry.

Improving role

This year we will:

- work with the DfT on the implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) within the rail industry
- work with the industry to formalise a TOC complaints handling audit programme, with a view to developing a “complaints handling audit” product
- work with the ORR on the development and implementation of the new rail industry complaints handling procedure and quality measures
- explore new methods of handling passenger contact/appeals.

Ongoing work

This year we will:

- handle enquiries from passengers, and intervene in issues raised from complaints
- handle cases where companies and passengers are deadlocked following a complaint, and gather intelligence to inform other areas of our work. We will achieve over 70% satisfaction with the way we deal with cases
- engage proactively with TOCs to help improve first-time complaint resolution
- carry out in depth complaints reviews with up to four train companies
- ensure the results of these reviews are understood and are acted upon
- comment on, and seek to make improvements to, proposed complaints handling procedures by TOCs and their application
- release complaints handling data onto our online data explorer

Aim 5: Improving access to services for transport users

Cross-modal

Public transport must cater for a diverse range of passengers, many of whom have differing needs. Last year we carried out a mystery shop exercise of the Passenger Assist scheme for rail passengers. Although there isn't a comparable scheme for bus passengers, we plan to research disabled passengers' experiences of using buses.

Access to transport is a particular concern to young people, who may have financial pressures and limited access to a car.

This year we will:

- investigate the experiences of bus passengers with disabilities
- hold two meetings of our accessibility forum each year
- analyse NRPS, TPS and BPS to assess the views of those with disabilities
- ensure that the views of those with disabilities are captured in our research programme
- comment on and seek to improve operators' proposed Disabled People's Protection Policies and their application
- publish research looking into disabled passengers' views of Smart Ticketing
- present research among young people more effectively, including analysis of Bus Value for Money research, NRPS, BPS, and consider using tighter age bands for more specific data.

Aim 6: increasing the influence of Transport Focus through building trust in our work

Transparency – being more visible, and measuring and reporting our performance

We take pride in the quality of our work. The clear, efficient and effective way that we run the organisation allows stakeholders and transport users to put their trust in us, and allows us to use our work to influence change.

This year Transport Focus will:

Communicate

- develop and introduce a new brand
- refresh and maintain an easy to use website - seek and publish feedback
- publish monthly newsletters for passengers and road users
- expand social media usage, and use technology to our advantage – for example webinars, interactive websites and instant messaging
- maintain a 24 hour press office
- increase awareness of our publications
- increase access to and usefulness of our research data
- publish proceedings and decisions of our Board and management team on our website

Track

- number of transport users we engage with through consultation, research and our contact team
- stakeholders we have influenced
- staff attitudes through an annual survey
- stakeholder views through a survey

Report

- six times a year in public at Board Meetings, held in different locations around the country
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reports to the board
- monthly performance and financial reports
- annual published report on performance, activity and expenditure
- examine other ways to gather and report our effectiveness
- update our online data tool each quarter

Organisation

- reaffirm commitment to all stakeholders as we take on our expanded remit
- strengthen internal and external communication

- conclude the change process with a clear picture of roles and structure across the organisation
- ensure office accommodation is fit for purpose
- develop an alternative funding model to ensure Transport Focus is able to continue to campaign on behalf of transport users whilst improving the value for money of its products.

We are looking forward to using the conclusions and recommendations from the DfT's Triennial Review of our organisation to help us continue to increase the value of our work.

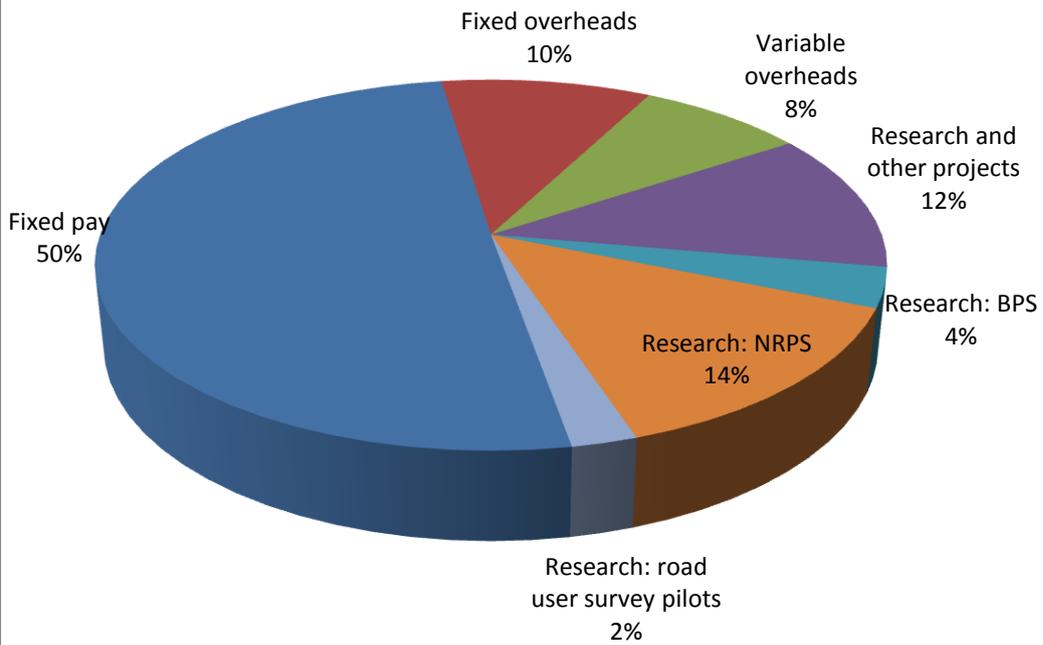
Appendix 1: resources

Transport Focus's budget for 2015-16 will be £3.74m plus national rail, bus and road user surveys of £1.3m, and additional funding of £1.45m for road user representation including piloting national road user satisfaction measures.

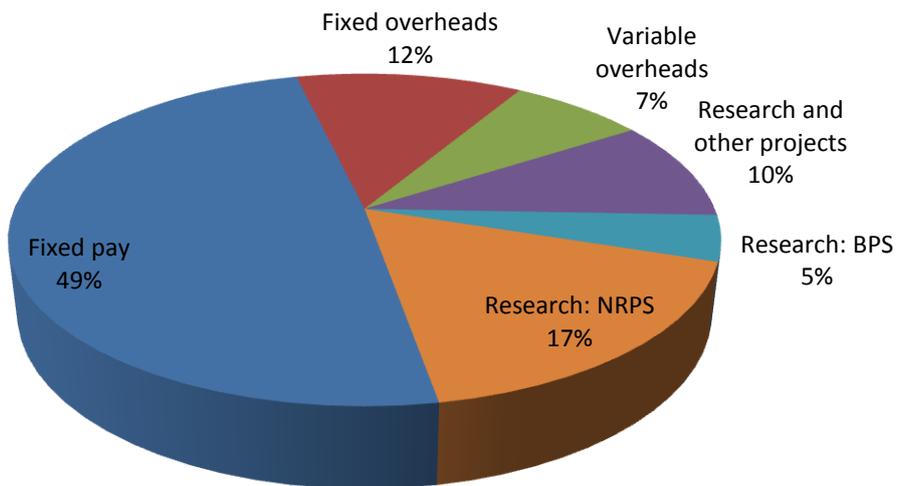
The costs for 2014-15 are for passenger representation only and exclude preparation costs for road user representation of £732,000.

£000's	2015-16 Budget	2014-15 Forecast outturn
Fixed pay	3,272	2,429
Fixed overheads	652	608
Variable overheads	520	362
Total running costs	4,444	3,399
Research and other projects (net cost)	785	479
Net operating costs	5,229	3,878
National surveys		
National rail passenger survey	886	850
Bus passenger survey	225	220
Road user satisfaction pilots	150	-
Total national surveys	1,261	1,070
Total net operating costs	6,490	4,948
Additional projects funded by the Department for Transport and other stakeholders		
Smart ticketing project	400	351
Passenger priorities for franchising and long-term planning	348	406

Budgets for 2015-16



Forecast Outturn for 2014-15



Staff and Board

While independent, Transport Focus is sponsored and substantially funded by the Department for Transport (DfT). We currently have 49 members of staff, most of whom are based in offices in London and Manchester. Seven are peripatetic. Transport Focus has motivated, energetic and capable staff. We want to keep it that way, as we can only be as good as the people who work for us.

We will continue to ensure that we have staff who *want* to work at Transport Focus by:

- working with staff to ensure they continue to get the coaching, development and management they need to do their jobs and to progress
- ensuring staff clearly see how their work fits into Transport Focus's overall aims and objectives
- ensuring all staff are supported by responsive, engaged and capable line managers
- continuing to have a training budget for external training courses
- making sure staff have the equipment they need to do their jobs
- making sure the organisation's processes support staff in their roles
- making sure we have clear, visible leadership for the organisation.

This will be measured through the annual **Staff Survey**.

Transport Focus's Board is crucial to ensuring proper, proportionate governance for the organisation. We currently have seven Board members appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. The Greater London Assembly and the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales also each appoint one member, making a total of 11 members including the Chair.

The Board's key role, supported by staff within Transport Focus, is to oversee the corporate governance of the organisation. This involves

- oversight of financial affairs, risk and remuneration
- challenging staff in a constructive way on the operation of the organisation
- setting strategic objectives and providing oversight of progress against them
- setting important policy lines the organisation takes on behalf of passengers.

Appendix 2: milestones, priorities, and risk

Key milestones

In time for the new financial year, we will publish key milestones against which we will schedule the deliverables in this plan. In setting such milestones, we will take account of the level of priority the work itself demands, whether it has been planned and/or funded by a third party, the external policy horizon and how such work might fit in and form a useful contribution to any debate.

Priorities

It is unusual in any one business year for the best of plans not to be interrupted by new priorities which were unforeseen at the time of planning. An ambitious plan has, by implication, little spare capacity or 'white space' in it and cannot keep absorbing more and more in-year initiatives without an impact on other planned deliverables.

In such circumstances Management Team will discuss and agree new priorities and what, if anything, will no longer be completed. It will report to the Board immediately after making such a decision. The decision will be reached by considering a number of questions:

Practicability – five key questions

Q1 Resources

- do we have the people/skills/time and money? Can we access resources elsewhere? If not, what do we **not** do instead, and why?

Q2 Value for Money

- can it be demonstrated?

Q3 Success/Risk

- is there a realistic chance of success?
- Do we know what the risks are?

Q4 Measurability

- can we measure the outcomes?
- can we influence?
- will we have an impact by doing this work?

Q5 Are we the best placed organisation that should carry it out?

- can we persuade or enable anyone else to do it outside of our own organisation?

Relevance – five key questions

Q1 Is it of direct concern to transport users?

- do we have evidence it matters to them now or in the future?
- is there proof of need/detriment?
- how many passengers are affected?

Q2 Is it of direct concern to stakeholders?

- do we have evidence it matters to them now or in the future?

Q3 Does it add value to past, present or future workstreams?

Q4 Would the organisation lose credibility by not doing this?

Q5 Is it timely?

- Do we only get one chance?
- Have we already missed the opportunity to change or influence anything?

Risk

As in previous years, our in-year business priorities will be risk-assessed based on our current risk management strategy. All in-year business priorities are classed as **programme** (rather than **strategic** or **operational**) risks and are based on organisational risk appetite as set by the board.

Risks to the delivery of in-year business priorities are reviewed monthly by management team and quarterly by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.