

GO EAST

Peer Review

March 2005

1 Introduction and Methodology

1.1 As part of the Government's modernisation agenda, and a commitment within the GO Network to continuous improvement, a local government style peer review process is being rolled out across the Go Network. Peer review as a well – established process for supporting whole organisation improvement. The purpose is to identify current strengths and any areas that require development. It is not an inspection; peer review is intended to provide a supportive approach.

1.2 This is a report of the peer review of Government Office for the East of England (GO East). It was carried out between 28 February and 4 March 2005. It was led by Roger Poole, Deputy Regional Director Government Office for the East Midlands. The other members of the team were:

- Terrie Alafat, Director for Homelessness and Housing Support, ODPM
- Bill Wicksteed, Consultant, SQW Limited
- Peter Gould, Chief Executive, Northamptonshire County Council
- Julie Anderson, Head of Business Development, Regional Co-ordination Unit (ODPM)

1.3 The programme for the week was arranged in advance. We spoke to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders both within the region and within government departments based in London. In addition GO East prepared a self-assessment of its own performance, provided the team with substantial supporting material including staff and stakeholder surveys. GO East also commissioned a consultant to carry out a series of focus groups with staff, and we have seen the report detailing the results of these. Examples of the stakeholders the review team spoke to:

- Whitehall departments
- East of England Development Agency
- East of England Regional Assembly
- Local Authorities
- Connexions
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Economic Development Partnerships
- Local Learning and Skills Council
- Community Trust
- Colleges
- Universities

2 The Benchmark

2.1 The basis of the assessment is a specially constructed benchmark of the ideal, fully effective Government Office. In carrying out the peer review we sought to form a judgement of performance against these criteria, although given the constraints imposed by the timetable we were unable to cover all

aspects of the GO's work equally nor to form a judgement against all aspects of the benchmark.

- 2.2 We were also guided by the Management Board on our focus and we therefore looked particularly at the approach of the office towards integrating effectively the growth and regeneration agendas, which has been identified a priority for the office, although work on taking this forward has only recently started.
- 2.3 The feedback given by the team on the last day of the review reported on the key messages. This report gives a more detailed written account structured around the benchmark of a fully effective Government Office.
- 2.4 We report our findings under the following headings:

- Opportunities
- Leadership
- Planning and Performance
- People
- Partnership
- Communication and Reputation
- Growth and Regeneration
- Concluding Observations

3 Acknowledgements

- 3.1 We are very appreciative of the warm welcome and hospitality provided by the Government Office during the week. We are also very grateful for the support and help provided by Andrew Limb, Paul Glossop and their team. The organisation of the schedule for the week enabled us to see a range of stakeholders who were able to give a wide-ranging assessment of GO East performance.
- 3.2 We were encouraged by Caroline Bowdler, the Regional Director, and her senior management team to be thorough and robust in reporting what we found and what we thought. The review team found this openness and willingness to learn and to improve very refreshing. Our report pulls no punches: where we have found areas for development we have sought to be constructive in our comments; equally there were many areas where GO East was performing strongly and we have identified and commented here too.
- 3.3 We are also grateful to the many stakeholders who gave their time to us, and for their honest and constructive views and comments. What was clear -to the team was the strong desire to see an effective Government Office acting on behalf of central government in the region.

4 Opportunities

- 4.1 This part of the report attempts to pull together some of the consistent messages we heard during the review and which we believe provide strong evidence of the role which stakeholders want GO East to fulfil. They are opportunities for GO East to grasp and where improvements in performance can be achieved. They represent areas where stakeholders would welcome a bigger GO East contribution.
- 4.2 Partners see GO East as an important organisation within the region and want it to be successful - punching its weight and playing a stronger role in regional issues. Showing greater leadership on the critical issues facing the region and a strong desire for GO East to be more pro-active in seeking to make greater sense of a complex agenda was a constant message given to us. Stakeholders want GO East as representing central government, to be more pro-active in setting national policies in a regional context.
- 4.3 Whitehall departments want GO East to have strong regional influence in implementing their policies and to integrate them effectively with other departmental policies. They wanted more understanding of the work of GO East and more engagement. They put a premium on proposals for the effective delivery of national policies in the region rather than the articulation of difficulties.
- 4.4 There is a desire by regional and sub-regional stakeholders for a more strategic and cross-cutting dialogue with the GO. The feeling was this was patchy at present. In part this is also about the GO itself and its people being more self confident about setting and taking forward an agenda and debating and finding solutions to reflect national and regional priorities. A commonly held view is that while the GO knew their individual departmental subjects, there was less confidence in debating and discussing cross-departmental issues in a strategic way.
- 4.5 None of these issues should come as any surprise to GO East. In the senior management team's opening presentation to us they summarised the challenges for GO East as follows:
- national - more consistent impact in Whitehall
 - regional - developing the relationship with EEDA as a regional partner
 - local - better focus on places
 - corporate - more customer focused, self-challenging, innovative and professional.

At the time of the review GO-East were in the process of a restructuring and change management exercise to develop more senior management capacity, re-group functions to improve synergy, and develop more focus on places. There were also advanced plans for a leadership programme for Directors and Team Leaders. The senior management team was keen to use the review to test the direction and pace of this improvement work.

Headline messages

4. 6 People see a strong role for GO East and want it to:

- continue to grip the growth agenda
- take a wider leadership role
- be more proactive
- be more self confident
- be more consistent in discussing cross cutting issues in a strategic way
- make sense of a complex agenda.

5 Leadership

What the benchmark says

Be forward thinking and innovative, be prepared to challenge current practice and to 'think the unthinkable'. Have a strong customer focus, drive for continuous improvement and not be complacent.

Recognise its regional leadership role and listen and learn from what it hears. Analyse regional needs and take appropriate action to articulate these to central government and regional partners, adding value by making appropriate linkages to influence policy and programme development.

Have a clear long term vision for the economic, social and environmental well being of its region. Encourage and contribute to close and regular contact between the office, key regional partners and the wider region. Develop a vision and strategy for the region through active participation of the key regional partners.

Strengths

- planning and transport
- very positive on growth
- able to bring people together
- always supportive and helpful
- European programmes
- listening and understanding.

Development Areas

- strategic
- ambitious
- agenda setting
- self confidence
- engage
- pro-active.

Analysis

- 5.1 GO East is seen to be very engaged in the growth areas. It has a strong profile particularly in the planning and transport areas where many in the region commented favourably on the involvement of the GO. The Review Team recognises that this is a very considerable achievement, demanding a strategic perspective, risk-taking, evidence-led negotiation, and influencing in circumstances of extreme political sensitivity. Good examples were given of the GO seeking to resolve difficult issues by bringing partners or authorities together:

‘GO is very positive on growth and managed to find a consensus’.

A particular example was the GO intervention to secure agreement on a joint way forward in planning for growth in Luton and the surrounding districts. Similar positive comments were made by a range of partners about GO’s positive approach on the management of European programmes. Here the GO was seen to be pragmatic and helpful in making sense of complex rules and regulations.

- 5.2 Many to whom we spoke see the GO as always willing and helpful, and made favourable comments about more junior staff members who were seen as enthusiastic and very supportive, particularly at project officer level:

‘very helpful in explaining our eligibility for funding’.

However, these were not consistent messages. We found these strengths were inconsistent across the GO. In some cases stakeholders are expecting the GO to raise its profile and to use its influence more proactively. Partners wanted the GO to show greater leadership in setting the regional and sub-regional agendas, and to bring a more strategic overview of the interaction of government policy as it plays out at the local and sub-regional levels. Comments made to the team included:

‘GO does not forward look. It is reactive not pro-active.’

‘Not forward thinking or ambitious.’

‘We are looking for stronger leadership in bringing together sub-regional and regional agencies.’

- 5.3 Some Whitehall stakeholders commented on the GO playing a very strong role in pursuing their policies effectively in the region and have full confidence in its approach. Others challenged whether the GO was clear about its role and saw the GO as too sympathetic to regional and sub-regional concerns. They felt the GO should focus more on identifying solutions which helped to achieve the effective delivery of departmental policies and priorities in the region. This was a theme also picked up by some regional stakeholders who desired more senior level engagement at a strategic level at which regional and national issues could be debated and discussed. It is clear that they are looking for the GO to take a much

stronger strategic lead in a cross-cutting way. Often the GO was seen to be too 'departmental' in its approach. While expertise by the GO in functional departmental policies was valued by many, there were frustrations expressed about the GO being too readily the mouthpiece for a department rather than taking a government wide approach. Partners said that they wanted greater advice on the integration of the delivery of government policies on the ground and were frustrated by an often too narrow perspective being taken by GO representatives.

- 5.4 Providing the right leadership is an issue which the senior management team in GO East have recognised. The strongly departmental/functional organisation has served them well and a variety of techniques have been tried in a 'virtual' way to look at issues from a sub-regional perspective. Directors had been allocated specific geographical responsibilities although it was acknowledged that the added value had been patchy. At the time of the review there were well advanced plans to reorganise the Director responsibilities and to have a smaller, more strategic senior management board supported by an operational group. We think that these are positive developments and it is important that the strategic board looks quickly to set a clearer direction and sense of purpose for the office, and establishes an agenda from the top that integrates the work of the office across departmental boundaries.
- 5.5 The functional/geographical conundrum needs to be tackled head on. We are not suggesting an alternative organisational structure based on geography rather than function. However, it is clear to us that past methods to focus on 'place' have had mixed success. The recent 'priority places' approach offers opportunities, although we found that there was not clear or consistent understanding about what this meant either in the office or externally. The recently established Sustainable Communities Unit, with the objective of developing integrated action plans for the priority places and delivered through 'virtual' team working is a clear response to manage matters differently.
- 5.6 We recognise that this approach is still developing. If its value is to be fully realised, there needs to be a clear view on accountability, and strong project management disciplines to ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to the delivery of the action plans. We doubt whether virtual teamworking alone will achieve this, and we encourage GO-East to strengthen its dedicated geographical focus.

6 Planning and Performance

What the benchmark says

Have a clear, long term vision for the economic, social and environmental well being of its region, which is supported by specific objectives and comprehensive arrangements for corporate planning.

Encourage and undertake with partners rigorous performance review and outcome measurement as well as carry out regular self assessment exercises.

Have defined the roles and responsibilities of its Directors and staff, and have developed appropriate structures that make effective use of its staff resources.

Deploy resources effectively according to departmental and regional priorities and in accordance with recognised government audit and accounting standards, so as to secure value for money for tax payers.

Demonstrate positive trends in the improvement of delivery of its activities and functions.

Strengths

- improved performance in the past two years
- representing the region's views to Whitehall
- approach to growth agenda
- practical support
- Cambridge, Cambridgeshire and Luton.

Development Areas

- consistency
- joining up
- engagement – face to face
- clearer priorities and objectives
- visibility and relationship with central Government
- risk and challenge.

Analysis

- 6.1 Virtually all to whom we spoke in the region commented they had seen an improvement in performance in the past two years. In part this can be attributed to the increased profile of the GO in the growth agenda, but we perceived it went wider than this, and could be attributed to the office as a whole.
- 6.2 The recent stakeholder survey confirms that in general performance is moving in the right direction, albeit slowly and not sufficiently quickly to be compared with the higher performing public sector organisations. However, our examination of the survey and our discussions with GO East suggest the sample needs reviewing. For example, some of the organisations and individuals contacted as part of the survey clearly had little or no contact with the GO, and had no reason for interaction with the GO.
- 6.3 As part of a new strategic approach to 'place' we suggest the GO considers alongside identifying the key priorities, the key local and sub-regional

stakeholders with whom they need to interact. A sharper awareness of who are main stakeholders for the GO, with a more pro-active relationship management policy, would lead to the GO setting and taking forward joint action plans, and provide a more meaningful database for future stakeholder surveys.

6.4 But the discussions we had did also confirm many of the messages in the survey. It is clear that there remains some misunderstanding about the role of the Government Office and a confusion about its responsibilities and those of EEDA (the Regional Development Agency). This is an issue which is not unique to GO East, and is a factor for all GOs. Many had not seen the GO East Business plan (although it had been widely circulated) and could not say what role the GO was seeking to play in the region or what it was seeking to achieve, except in relation to the broad growth agenda.

6.5 As a conduit of the region's views to central Government there is a consistency of opinion that this is an important role for GO East. Many had actively sought GO East's support in this way:

'GO represented our case well on the planning reforms'

although there were a number of criticisms that there had been little feedback on outcomes. Other influential stakeholders were forthright in their opinions:

'GO is without real influence – a post box. I tend to bypass it'
'GO does not punch above its weight'.

6.6 It was clear that many key stakeholders are wanting a closer and more widening dialogue with GO East. They recognise that there is an expanding regional agenda through the role of local government, devolving decision making and Local Area Agreements, and need help in interpreting its impact on their work and how they can influence future policy thinking. They see GO East playing an increasingly important role and want GO East to be more pro-active in its engagement with them and to be more challenging in setting down what it sees as the priorities for the region.

6.7 Managing the expectations of stakeholders is an important issue for GO East. This will be important if, as we have recommended, they seek actively to manage relationships with stakeholders as they will have to be clear and open about their priorities and what they want to achieve. A plea for one point of contact – a 'relationship manager' - was made by many partners and organisations. This is something that we understand GO East is considering as it develops a clearer geographical or 'places' approach alongside its current functional organisation.

6.8 Our discussions with Whitehall stakeholders presented a range of perspectives. Some, for example the Department of Transport, found the GO East performance very strong and supportive of their interests. There was frequent interaction between the Department and GO East. This was

not the case with all Departments; those which regarded it less well saw it as 'low key' and 'low profile.' Other GOs were seen as more innovative and less risk averse. It was clear that hard information about what GO East was doing was limited, and that was obscuring some of the GO's achievements.

- 6.9 Communication between some key departmental stakeholders and the GO should therefore be improved. In many cases it is simply keeping in touch regularly with key departmental contacts. Departments want to know what is happening and expressed to us a strong interest in understanding the local and sub-regional issues which may affect implementation of their policies and programmes.

7 People

What the benchmark says

Ensure that its activities and functions are carried out or enabled by well-trained, knowledgeable, motivated and committed staff.

Have clear corporate structures that enabled it to be open, ethical and non-discriminatory, and to promote high standards of behaviour amongst its directors and staff.

Apply diversity principles to all its principles and activities in order to enhance the quality of life of the whole region.

Strengths

- junior members of staff
- supportive and helpful
- practical and sensitive
- professional skills, eg planning
- good advice on projects.

Development Areas

- breadth of understanding and context
- creativity and drive
- skills as well as knowledge and experience
- interpersonal skills
- leadership at all levels.

Analysis

- 7.1 We found a mixed picture. As an IIP organisation the GO rightly takes the training and development of its staff very seriously. The latest IIP assessor's report is very impressive both in terms of the standards the GO has attained and maintained, and in the positive way they have addressed development needs:

“there is a real focus on continuing improvement in GO-East”

Many comments were made to us about the supportive and helpful approach by many GO staff, particularly those managing programmes or projects, and especially about junior members of staff:

‘many junior members of staff very good; many senior staff appear too busy’.

7.2 Very positive comments were also made about the professional skills within the GO, particularly in planning. The GO policy of strengthening and increasing its level of professional planners within the office has been successful and welcomed by stakeholders.

7.3 Although comments were made about some staff lacking expertise or knowledge, these were largely attributed to a period when staff turnover was particularly high following the co-location of staff to one office in Cambridge. There is now more stability in the office.

7.4 As we have mentioned earlier, however, specialist or departmental policy expertise needs to be balanced with a breadth across a wider canvas of policy and a need to integrate different departmental policies to add value. This is not an issue only for GO-East; GO network reviews, such as the PA Consulting report, have picked up and commented on it.

7.5 GO East has recognised the need to keep all staff informed and to brief them on the broader policy and operational context in which the GO operates. The cascade briefing and feedback system, together with Regional Director all staff meetings are a very good approach.

7.6 The ‘Linking Thinking’ programme developed by GO-East, a structured learning programme of workshops and visits shared with EEDA and EERA, is another excellent approach which engages staff and external partners. Cross-team meetings on a geographical basis further encourage a broader understanding, but ultimately we found many stakeholders are wanting not just understanding, but also a commitment in looking at issues holistically, and in finding multi-faceted solutions. Typical comments made to us included:

‘insufficient understanding to have a wide ranging discussion’

‘lack of expertise therefore cannot influence’.

7.7 In their self assessment, GO East acknowledged that these are challenging areas to tackle. We believe the new approach to the composition and role of their Board is a step in the right direction, and the efforts to engage team leaders more actively in policy development and through a Grade 7 Development group are also positive steps, as are the advanced plans for a leadership programme for Directors and Team Leaders.

8 Communication and Reputation

What the benchmark says

Be seen as the representative of central government in the region communicating government policy effectively to a wide range of audiences and both educating and raising public awareness about significant policy issues.

Strengths

- approachable
- accessible
- strong on process
- link to Whitehall
- understanding the region and localities.

Development Areas

- communicate priorities
- profile
- consistency
- responsiveness

Analysis

- 8.1 The GO is seen to be important and there is a strong desire for it to play an influential – and an increasingly influential role in the region. GO East has some valuable strengths on which it can build. It is seen as approachable and accessible and by many as helpful and useful. Many saw value from their interaction with the GO, in particular as a way to access and influence Whitehall Departments, but there were mixed opinions and views (as mentioned elsewhere in the report) about the degree to which the GO was influential. Many stakeholders valued the knowledge the GO and its staff had of the region and its localities. Our experience talking to staff confirmed this. We found the staff very informed and knowledgeable about the localities in which they worked, and of the region more widely. A concern we picked up, however, and particularly from our conversations with Whitehall departments was that this knowledge and understanding was not always recognised or used effectively. It was often said that local knowledge and experience was presented in a negative way or added to complexity rather than offering solutions.
- 8.2 GO East has produced a number of publications, including its business plan and objectives seeking to explain its role and purpose, and the way it organises its work with senior management responsibilities. It has a web-site, which has just been upgraded under the network web-site rationalisation programme. Nonetheless there remained a consistent lack of understanding by many about GO East priorities and who does what in the

organisation. It is difficult for us to form a firm view on why this should be the case but it is clearly an important issue for GO East to address as it is impacting on the way the GO is seen and understood by its stakeholders. There may not be a straightforward solution. But piecing together the information gathered during the review suggests to us that stakeholders are wanting the GO to be more pro-active in setting down what it sees as the key strategic priorities for the region and to be clear about the agenda for tackling these. Stakeholders want the GO to be actively engaged and leading a debate about the impact of government policies in the round on the region and its localities.

- 8.3 As another stakeholder told us 'reputation relies on the quality of senior level contacts' and these are therefore key issues for GO East to address both in its restructuring of its Board and senior team responsibilities, but also in the Leadership programme for its Directors and Team Leaders.
- 8.4 The communication plans for the restructuring work, and for this review, will provide opportunities for the GO-East senior management team to demonstrate their commitment to driving improvement in this area.
- 8.5 One area which became a consistent theme during our discussions with Whitehall stakeholders was the length of time it sometimes took GO East to respond to questions or to requests for advice. These views were mirrored by some regional stakeholders and we see similar comments in the recent stakeholder survey. It was also commented that in the absence of a regular contact it was often the case that no-one else in the GO could help. We are not in a position to speculate on the reasons for this but as this will impact on the GO's reputation we have mentioned it in our report.

9 Partnership

What the benchmark says

Operate as a corporate entity, recognising and demonstrating the inter-relationship between its activities, and work with local authorities, government agencies and voluntary organisations to ensure seamless delivery of its programmes and activities wherever practical.

Encourage and undertake with partners rigorous performance review and outcome measurement as well as carry out regular self-assessment exercises.

Encourage and contribute to close and regular contact between the office, key regional partners and the region. Develop a vision and strategy for the region through active participation of key regional partners.

Strengths

- supportive

- effective
- responsive
- inclusive.

Development Areas

- EEDA and EERA
- purpose and objectives
- managing stakeholder relationships
- confront difficult issues.

Analysis

- 9.1 We found that regional and sub-regional stakeholders were generally comfortable working with GO East. Many good, close relationships have been established but we were left with an overriding impression that many of the relationships were passive. While there were many warm comments such as ‘GO is effective. We feel included and to be a partner’ and ‘GO East is a supportive partner, understands the agenda and the priorities’, there was a strong desire by partners for the GO to be clearer about its objectives and priorities and to be more challenging. For example:

‘We can work even better on problem solving. Need more honesty about our respective strengths and weaknesses.’

‘Very responsive to a cry for help – less so when we need to discuss possible concerns for the future’.

- 9.2 We have suggested earlier that GO East seeks pro-actively to manage its relationships with key stakeholders. Our findings in this area of the benchmark strongly reinforce this view. Partners are looking more from the GO than being responsive, and want the GO to provide a lead in setting a regional or sub-regional agenda, and to be active in bringing issues together. ‘We do not get a sense of the big picture. We have to piece it together ourselves’ is a quote which illustrates what many told us.
- 9.3 Although (as in other regions) many stakeholders remained unsure of the respective roles of the GO, the RDA and the Assembly, all recognised it was important to the region for these bodies to be effective. We received a range of views about the respective performance of all these organisations, but a consistent opinion that the three should be working even more closely and constructively together.
- 9.4 We know that the GO has been influential in contributing to an integrated regional strategy (to distil priorities and test the fit between the region’s other key strategies). It has been working with EERA and EEDA to develop a clearer regional and sub-regional architecture for delivery of these strategies; putting the structures in place will be a key priority in the coming year. Our contacts with EERA and EEDA revealed that while at this regional scale the relationships are strong and have been tested in difficult

circumstances, they would welcome greater senior level and forward looking dialogue with GO East on some of the critical issues facing the region and its localities. There are therefore clear opportunities for the GO to play a leading role in taking this forward.

10 Growth and Regeneration

- 10.1 In our review we were asked to look specifically at the way the office is integrating growth and regeneration (ie using the opportunities of growth, and the public and private sector investment associated with it, to drive forward regeneration). Three growth areas are represented in the south and west of the region and cover a significant part of its surface area and population. By contrast pockets of deprivation are dispersed in urban and rural areas within the region and the region does not receive anything significant by way of regeneration funding. There are two New Deal for Communities programmes based in Norwich and Luton, two Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder projects in Basildon and Wisbech, and two Neighbourhood Renewal funded programmes in Luton and Great Yarmouth, which are also areas eligible for Objective 2 ERDF.
- 10.2 In their opening presentation to the review team, the GO East Board underlined the importance of this opportunity to link regeneration and growth.
- 10.3 On the basis of an analysis of areas facing multiple challenges, the GO has presently identified three priority places – Peterborough, Luton and Harlow – in the first phase of an initiative to bring about more focused integrated cross-team working. (Thames Gateway South Essex had already been established as a national priority, and is also part of this approach.) It has also recently created a small Sustainable Communities team which will co-ordinate within the GO initially and later with partners through an agreed action plan for each place.
- 10.4 In the staff focus groups held for our review it is clear that while knowledge of Priority Places in the office was high, less than a quarter were well informed of the purpose of the new approach, why the areas had been selected and the objectives of the new approach. The focus groups also revealed that the office priority of linking regeneration and growth was not yet widely understood in terms of the long term goals and the method and process by which they would be achieved.
- 10.5 Our discussion with external stakeholders revealed a similar lack of understanding. While the principle received strong support there was no real understanding of what this meant in practical terms and the way partners were expected to interact with GO East. There was a patchy understanding about how the process would now move forward; each area was very positive about being identified as a priority but there was considerable confusion by many partners about next steps. Some told us they had discovered that they were a priority place by accident rather than

by design. Some could recall being consulted about an action plan and commenting on it, but had no idea of the timescales or whether their comments had been accepted. In short we found a lack of clear understanding of the approach within the GO and a greater lack of understanding and clarity by partners in the areas concerned.

- 10.6 Despite this we believe the approach is sound, and the focus on place through which to drive forward an integrated approach to delivering is the right one. It is an example where the GO is being proactive in seeking to set an agenda which is what many partners want the GO to do. But in communicating and taking forward this new approach the message has not been well understood. We found people wanting to know in general terms, and in respect of their areas, what success would look like. There are obvious lessons here for the GO in the way it needs to improve its communication with partners and its staff.

11 Concluding observations

- 11.1 It is very difficult in a short period of time to cover all the operations within the Government Office. However, sometimes first impressions are very perceptive in getting beneath the surface. We therefore think it helpful to pass on these impressions together with our thoughts on what we see as the next steps for GO East as they take forward the findings presented in this report.
- 11.2 The material provided to the review team was very comprehensive and revealed a thorough understanding and analysis of the range of functional issues undertaken by the GO. It also revealed a good in-depth knowledge of the region. Where we were a little disappointed was in the GO's self-assessment against the benchmark criteria. While useful, it was more a presentation of activities instead of a challenging self-critique of where the GO felt it measured up against the criteria. That is not to say that the GO do not understand the challenges they face; the presentation they gave to us and our subsequent conversations demonstrated they do. We would have welcomed more critical self-analysis.
- 11.3 We were impressed with the planned and measured approach through which the GO tackles change. Director led improvement and working groups cover a range of corporate and other issues and involve a wide cross-section of the office. The processes and disciplines followed appeared to us to be very robust. Our concerns are about how quickly this work translates into action and how these various streams of activity are pulled together in delivering a 'vision' or sense of purpose for what the organisation wants to be, and wants to be recognised as being. We saw a lot of good things happening but we got no real sense of the direction of travel or what success for the organisation would look like.
- 11.4 Despite the clear drivers for change within the network, our impression was one of an organisation comfortable with its strong links with departmental

policies and reluctant to challenge the status quo or to take positive, creative steps to meld policies into a coherent whole. There is also the need for the GO to respond to these drivers for change with a greater degree of urgency. One comment typifies this:

‘The GO needs to learn to run a little faster’.

- 11.5 A challenge facing the GO is to strike a better balance between function and place. Stakeholders consistently told us they want a broader strategic lead and dialogue with GO East. The proposed restructuring and new Director responsibilities address this in part, as does the ‘priority place’ initiative with the new sustainable communities team. This may not be enough. Stakeholders are wanting a senior level ‘relationship manager’ with whom they can relate on a cross-cutting agenda. In taking forward its current restructuring we strongly recommend GO East develop this approach, and at the same time look to clarify accountabilities and responsibilities through a stronger approach to matrix management. The challenge also is to retain functional and departmental knowledge while raising the awareness and responsibility of individuals to stretch their horizons outside their familiar boundaries. The rewards of a more integrated approach to the delivery of policy are more satisfied customers in the region and in Whitehall.
- 11.6 As with any change, leadership from the top of the office will be essential. Directors should collectively and individually demonstrate commitment to this new approach and act as role models. A renewed sense of direction, supported by clear cross-cutting and meaningful objectives, should encourage new ways of working and thinking. Team leaders also have a critical role to play in leading change. Cross-team working and a more collaborative approach across functional areas can be encouraged by greater awareness and responsibility to look holistically at the interaction of policies and programmes. The proposed Leadership Development programme will be very important in seeking to identify and encourage these new approaches.
- 11.7 We are confident that GO East can rise to the challenges it faces.