



## **CONSULTANT BRIEF - 24<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

The purpose of this commission is to support VCAS and SVSA towards the establishment of a single Local Infrastructure Organisation subject to the safeguards and decision-making requirements set out in the MoU.

### **1. Background**

Voluntary & Community Action Sunderland (VCAS) and Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA) have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding and Transition Framework (March 2026), setting out a shared ambition to co-create a single, high-quality Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) for Sunderland.

This ambition is driven by a collective commitment to:

- Reducing duplication and inefficiency within local VCSE infrastructure
- Strengthening strategic leadership, advocacy and sector voice
- Improving clarity, accessibility and quality of infrastructure support
- Enhancing confidence among members, funders and statutory partners
- Securing a sustainable, NAVCA/LIQA-accredited infrastructure model for the future
- Ensure the sector is well-positioned and has the capacity to respond to external commissioning and funding opportunities.

The MoU confirms that the development of a single LIO must be:

- Sector-led and co-created, not imposed
- Grounded in due diligence and transparency
- Protective of independence, governance integrity and staff
- Aligned with NAVCA's Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA)

VCAS and SVSA now seek an independent consultant to provide focused leadership, facilitation and technical expertise to support this transition process.

### **2. Purpose of the Commission**

The purpose of this commission is to support VCAS and SVSA to move, through a structured and time-bound transition process, towards the establishment of a single Local Infrastructure Organisation for Sunderland, subject to the safeguards and decision-making requirements set out in the MoU.

The consultant will:

- Drive and coordinate the transition process, ensuring momentum, rigour and clarity
- Enable informed decision-making through robust options appraisal and due diligence
- Support sector-led engagement to shape the future LIO
- Prepare both organisations for conditional implementation of an agreed single-LIO model
- Position the work in relation to strategic developments and opportunities relevant to the Sunderland VCSE sector.

The consultant's role recognises that while the intended destination is a single LIO, decisions to proceed must be informed by evidence, consultation and proper governance approval.

### **3. Role of the Consultant**

The consultant will act as:

- An independent external facilitator, accountable to joint VCAS–SVSA governance
- A transition programme lead, coordinating activity, timelines and dependencies
- A specialist advisor on charity governance, option appraisal, organisational integration and legal pathways
- A critical friend, supporting ambition while ensuring risks and safeguards are properly addressed
- A specialist to provide insight into the wider strategic and policy framework influencing VCSE Sector infrastructure

The consultant will work under the direction of jointly agreed governance arrangements, but is expected to provide pace, challenge and structure throughout

### **4. Scope of Work**

#### **4.1 Strategic Transition Support**

The consultant will:

- Support the development of a transition plan, setting out:
  - Key phases, milestones and gateways
  - Decision points requiring board or member approval
  - Conditions required to proceed to implementation

- Facilitate joint board sessions to:
  - Refine and agree the proposed purpose, values and core functions of the future LIO
  - Test alignment with NAVCA/LIQA and sector expectations
- Provide advice on legal and structural options for forming a single LIO, including:
  - Asset and contract transfer
  - TUPE implications
  - Regulatory requirements
- Produce a risk register and mitigation plan that explicitly addresses:
  - Independence
  - Sector voice
  - Financial and workforce risks
  - Reputational considerations

## **4.2 Organisational and Operational Design**

The consultant will:

- Map and analyse:
  - Existing infrastructure functions
  - Staffing and workforce arrangements
  - Funding streams and liabilities
  - Governance and membership models
- Develop clear operating-model options, with a stated focus on the development of a single LIO, alongside any credible alternatives required for assurance.
- For the preferred single-LIO model, outline:
  - Core functions aligned with NAVCA/LIQA
  - Proposed governance structure
  - Indicative staffing model
  - Financial sustainability considerations
- Identify areas of duplication and opportunities for rationalisation.

### **4.3 Stakeholder and Sector Engagement**

The consultant will:

Co-design and implement a sector engagement and consultation plan, ensuring:

- VCSE organisations understand the ambition for a single LIO
- Opportunities to shape design, priorities and governance
- Facilitate consultation sessions with members, partners and stakeholders.
- Ensure consultation feedback is:
  - Transparently recorded
  - Clearly reflected in decision-making
  - Used to build confidence and legitimacy.

### **4.4 Project and Transition Management**

The consultant will:

- Establish and manage a clear programme plan, aligned with the MoU and Transition Framework.
- Attend and support:
  - Joint working group meetings
  - Board discussions where required
- Provide regular progress updates and manage interdependencies.
- Support shared reporting requirements to funders where applicable.

### **4.5 Conditional Implementation Planning**

Where agreed decision points are reached, the consultant will:

- Prepare implementation-ready documentation to enable an orderly move toward a single LIO, including:
  - Draft governance documents
  - Transition and handover plans
  - Initial operating and staffing frameworks
  - Produce an initial list of priorities.
- Support preparatory steps for launch, recognising that final decisions rest with each organisation's governance arrangements.

## **5. Deliverables**

### **Core Outputs**

- Transition and programme plan agreed by partners
- Options appraisal with a clearly articulated preferred single-LIO model
- Governance and operating-model proposals aligned with NAVCA/LIQA
- Legal, financial and workforce due-diligence summaries
- Risk register and mitigation framework
- Sector engagement and consultation outputs
- Monthly or agreed progress reports
- Final transition report with recommendations and next steps toward establishment of a single LIO

### **Optional Outputs (subject to agreement)**

- Support for senior role design or recruitment
- Change-management workshops for staff and trustees
- Early strategic planning materials for the new LIO

## **6. Timescale**

The commission is expected to operate within a 6–12-month period, with detailed milestones agreed at inception. The programme should be sufficiently paced to:

- Maintain momentum toward a single LIO
- Allow for meaningful consultation and due diligence
- Meet funder and governance requirements.

## **7. Reporting and Governance**

The consultant will report jointly to:

- The Chairs of VCAS and SVSA
- Or a Joint Working Group established under the MoU

All work will comply with agreed decision-making, communication and escalation protocols.

## **8. Confidentiality and Independence**

The consultant must:

- Be demonstrably independent of VCAS, SVSA and the Sunderland VCSE sector
- Declare and manage conflicts of interest
- Maintain strict confidentiality
- Respect organisational autonomy while supporting shared ambition

## 9. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals should include:

1. Understanding of the brief and context
2. Proposed methodology and approach, including:
  - Transition management and framework
  - Sector engagement
  - Risk and due diligence
3. **Relevant experience**, particularly:
  - Charity or infrastructure organisational frameworks, structural options, including options appraisal and due-diligence processes for organisations
  - Sector-led organisational change
4. Proposed personnel, roles and time commitment
5. Indicative timetable and milestones
6. Budget and fee proposal, including day rates and assumptions
7. Declaration of independence and conflicts of interest
8. References (minimum two)

## 10. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against:

- Understanding of the ambition to create a single LIO in line with the MoU
- Quality and credibility of approach
- Relevant experience and track record
- Ability to operate as an independent, trusted facilitator
- Value for money
- Capacity to deliver within required timescales

## **11. Submission Details**

**Submission deadline:** Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July, 12 noon

**Submission method:** martin.brookes@vonne.org.uk

**Contact for clarification questions:** martin.brookes@vonne.org.uk

### **Final note**

The ambition for a single LIO, is conditional on evidence, consultation and governance approval. This brief does not assume away due diligence or sector consent, but it also does not retreat from the MoU's stated ambition: to co-create a single, sustainable, LIQA/NAVCA-aligned Local Infrastructure Organisation for Sunderland.