

VONNE Strategy 2026 - 2035

*Supporting, promoting and
advocating for the VCSE sector*



We're delighted to share our future strategy.

Following a period of rapid organisational growth and change, we're taking the opportunity to refresh our strategy. This means we can place a greater emphasis on our core purpose of **supporting, promoting** and **advocating** for the North East VCSE sector.

As a **membership organisation**, we'll be focussing more directly on putting **member voices, experiences and needs** at the heart of our work. This will see us develop greater cohesion across our work streams, including **building stronger connections** between policy, members and communications – the core of our work.

This 10 year strategy shows the work of VONNE, with a focus on **plans and ambitions for the future**. Our intention in developing a 10 year strategy is to align outcomes with Combined Authority **Local Growth Plans (LGP)** and **'Fit for the Future' the NHS 10 year health plan** for England.

Through programmes, areas of work, networks, stakeholders and membership, **we're excited to do more with and for the sector.**



Who is VONNE?



VONNE (Voluntary Organisations' Network North East) is the **membership** and **regional infrastructure body** for the voluntary, **community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector** covering the **North East of England**.

What does VONNE do?

As a membership organisation, **VONNE exists to support, promote and advocate** for the North East VCSE sector to ensure it's better **understood, appreciated and supported**.

How does VONNE do this?

VONNE works to ensure the sector's voice is heard. Information, networks, and services for members are the key tools. We share all relevant information with members, partners and networks. This includes funders, statutory bodies and policymakers as well as the sector itself.

Why does VONNE do this?

VONNE's aim is to support the VCSE sector to flourish. This requires the sector to be **valued and an equal partner** in decision making to **create a fairer, greener and successful region**. High quality information about, as well as for, the sector, is essential to achieve this.



How VONNE Creates Impact



Vision

A thriving VCSE sector supporting communities and addressing inequalities in the North East of England.

Mission

VONNE supports, promotes and advocates for the North East's VCSE sector. Through information, membership, and networks, we will help them thrive, collaborate, and succeed.

Strategic Priorities

Support

To support a diverse VCSE sector by providing high-quality services that strengthen capacity, capability, and impact.

Promote

To promote the value and contribution of the VCSE sector to a wide range of audiences.

Advocate

To advocate for the VCSE sector as a vital partner in shaping policy, strategy, and public services.

Organisational Aims

Membership

Policy & Data

Comms &
Marketing

Incubator

Health &
Wellbeing

How VONNE Creates Impact

VONNE's programmes and projects are all connected, working together to strengthen the VCSE sector across the North East.

Nothing we do stands alone — each area of work reinforces the others, creating a strong, coordinated ecosystem.

At the heart of everything are three strategic aims - to **support**, **promote** and **advocate**.

These aims underpin every programme we run, and they work best when they work together.

- **Support** builds sector capacity.
- **Promote** raises the sector's profile and influence.
- **Advocate** ensures the sector's voice shapes policy and decision-making.

By weaving these aims through all our workstreams, we create shared insight, stronger partnerships, and a collective voice that delivers real impact for the region.

One organisation. Many programmes. One purpose: **to strengthen the VCSE sector so it can thrive.**



Why now

Devolution is reshaping the region. This opens a significant window for VONNE to work with regional leaders and policymakers to **ensure the VCSE sector is properly understood, valued and supported** within economic planning and decision-making.

At a time when **local growth, economic inactivity and community wellbeing are high on the regional agenda**, the **VCSE sector is central to delivering solutions**. VONNE is uniquely positioned as a trusted convenor to help the sector contribute effectively to these priorities and to strengthen collaboration across the region.

Statutory partners such as the NHS and DWP are increasingly looking for **shared, community-led approaches to complex challenges**. The sector is well placed to provide them, and VONNE can help ensure **VCSE organisations influence and benefit from stronger regional policy, partnerships and investment**. There is also growing opportunity to work with the private sector as social value commitments expand.

Nationally, **shifting political landscapes and rising division are impacting communities**, increasing the need for a **strong and coordinated VCSE voice**. At the same time, poverty, technological change and climate pressures risk deepening inequalities across the North East. With its reach, relationships and understanding of local need, the **VCSE sector is essential to shaping fair and inclusive responses**. Now more than ever, VONNE has a vital role in **supporting, promoting and advocating** for the sector to influence a **just transition for the region**.



Devolution

Community
Cohesion

AI and
technology

Economic
Growth


Funding

Why VONNE

We are the **largest regional membership organisation in England** for the VCSE sector.

VONNE has been established for 25 years and has a strong reputation. It is both well known and well regarded across the North East. From 2019, VONNE grew rapidly. In this time, we have **built and facilitated a wide range of partnerships, collaborations, and networks, and developed strategic relationships** with key regional bodies, funders, and commissioners. We now hold numerous positions with key strategic bodies enabling us to **influence policy and practice**.

Membership has grown to over 1,500 member organisations and we have extensive reach across the sector and the region through our networks and communication channels.



“If VONNE didn’t exist we’d all be sitting here now thinking, ‘we need to invent a VONNE’.”

Rob Williamson OBE DL,
Community Foundation North East

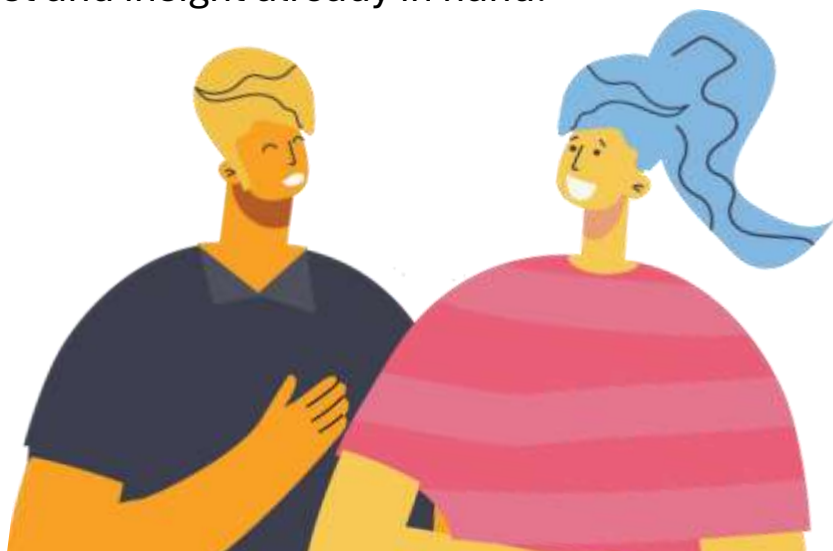
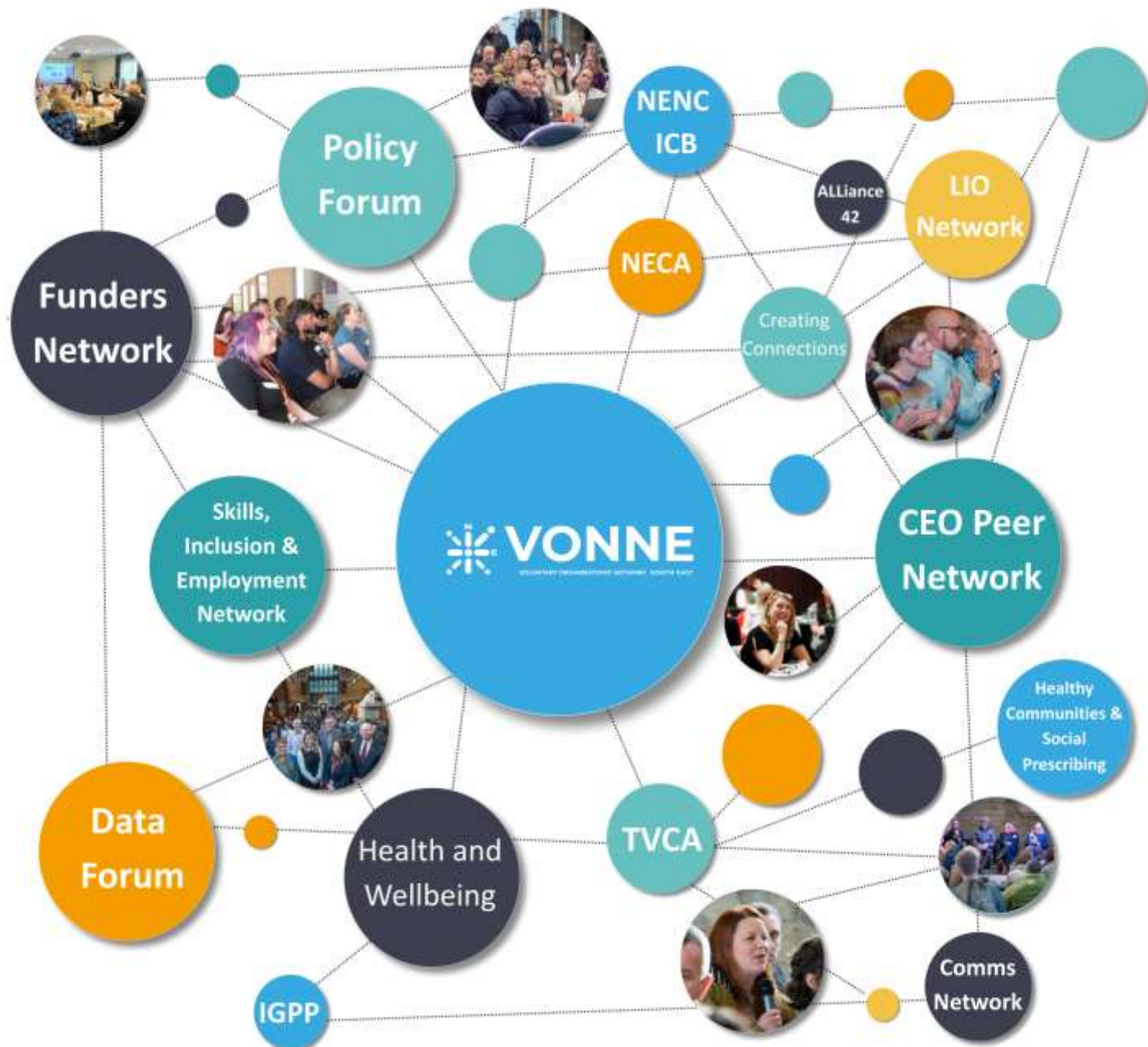


VONNE's Networks and Spheres of Influence

VONNE's strength lies in the **depth and reach of our networks**, connecting organisations, places and people across the region.

These relationships allow us to **gather insight, understand emerging issues and advocate effectively** for the sector.

Investing in VONNE's networks means we can **act quickly and credibly** when challenges arise, with trust and insight already in hand.



VONNE and Devolution



VONNE works closely with the North East Combined Authorities to **represent the sector's interests** and ensure its views and needs are taken into consideration in the **design of policies for the region**. As devolution continues with more powers going to the combined authorities, this will become even more important.

What we do and how we do it

- Hold seats on Combined Authority cabinets and working groups to **share sector insights and needs**.
- **Make connections** with organisations delivering services within Combined Authority work areas.
- **Deliver projects** commissioned by the Combined Authorities

Why that matters

Through this partnership, VONNE aims to help the Combined Authorities to **design more inclusive policies**, **draw on real-world expertise**, and **connect with the organisations delivering impact** on the ground, including with harder to reach communities, who may not normally engage with government services. Access to this intelligence and engagement results in **better-informed strategies, stronger collaboration, and a more effective regional approach to reducing inequalities and improving opportunities**.



VONNE and NECA: Creating Regional Impact



Since the launch of the North East Combined Authority in May 2024, **VONNE has been a key partner** in ensuring the VCSE sector's voice **shapes regional policy and decision-making**. As devolution deepens, this role becomes even more critical to achieving better outcomes for communities across the North East.

VONNE has **influenced and added value** through:

Strategic leadership and representation

- VONNE's Chief Executive sits on the NECA Cabinet and the *Home of Real Opportunity* Advisory Board, ensuring sector insights **influence strategy at the highest level**.
- Chairs the regional VCSE Leadership Board, **creating a clear route for intelligence to flow** between the sector and NECA.
- Advised NECA on appropriate VCSE representation across advisory boards and governance structures.



VONNE in the Tees Valley: Strengthening Our Presence, Growing Our Impact



Our Track Record

VONNE has **supported the VCSE sector** in the Tees Valley throughout its history, with all core programmes and services extending into the area. The innovative **LARCH social enterprise programme** is rooted in the Tees Valley, demonstrating our **commitment to place-based innovation** even where resources are limited.

Why This Matters

VONNE's continued presence in the Tees Valley shows our ambition to **show up where support is needed most**, **build credibility by working in communities with fewer resources**, and **demonstrating the sector's potential** — and why investment in VONNE strengthens regional outcomes.



VONNE in the Tees Valley: Strengthening Our Presence, Growing Our Impact



Our Ambition for the Tees Valley

As part of our new strategy, we will expand our work across the area and make it more visible. We'll do this by **strengthening member services** and sector support and by delivering **policy, data and insight work** relevant to Tees Valley priorities.

Through **targeted communications, networks and events** we'll raise the sector's profile.

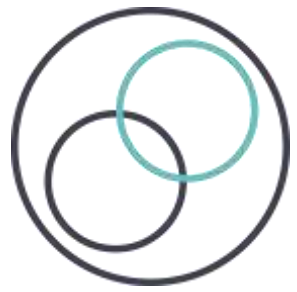
With dedicated funding, we'll **unlock impact through investment**, employing a Tees Valley-based staff member to **lead engagement and build partnerships**. We'll enhance collaboration with TVCA and local stakeholders and deliver **deeper insight, stronger connections, and more influential advocacy for the VCSE sector**.

Outcome

A more **connected, supported and influential VCSE sector** in the Tees Valley — **aligned with regional priorities** and **empowered to drive inclusive growth**.



VONNE and our role in the Health System



VONNE is a key strategic partner in Health and Care across the North East and North Cumbria

We lead this region's Voluntary Sector Alliance, and through this NENC VCSE Partnership Programme, we help to **shape and inform** health and wellbeing strategy and services in our region **working directly with the NHS**.

We play a **vital role** in supporting the ICB's health inequalities programme and prevention work through our Healthy Communities and Social Prescribing projects.

We **support greater VCSE voice and opportunities** within health research via our NIHR-funded Health and Wellbeing Research Partnerships Coordinator role.



VONNE and economic policy



The VCSE sector is an **important part of the economy** as well as a **vital part of the social fabric of communities** and **support for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable**. The role of the sector in the economy is too often overlooked. There are at least four ways the sector contributes:

Direct economic contribution	Delivery of essential services	Social value creation	Democratic legitimacy
As employers and service providers, charities and other voluntary organisations are a meaningful part of the regional economy.	Many VCSE organisations support economic participation — for example, through mental health services or employment programmes.	Through who they employ, how they work, and the volunteering they enable, charities deliver added social and economic returns.	Charities strengthen the design and delivery of public services by bringing community insight and credibility.

VONNE has already worked to promote this approach, encouraging NECA to give the sector a stronger role in its ten year Local Growth Plan. We are working on research about the Tees Valley to understand the size of the sector there and showcase its contribution to the economy.

We will continue to make the case for the sector's role in the economy and for its inclusion in the design of economic policies. Given the focus on economic inactivity in the region as well as nationally, this is especially important right now. Work will be led by our Policy and Data team, but will draw on members' voices and case studies from across all our programmes of work to do this.



VONNE and Artificial Intelligence (AI)



We recognise the growing influence and role of AI across society and the potential opportunities and challenges it brings. Our ambition is to position VONNE as the regional leading advocate for AI in the voluntary sector, shaping discourse and foreseeing that sector adoption is led by policy-informed, emerging opportunities. VONNE will implement a strategic approach to AI that both advocates for the sector externally and enhances internal operations, ensuring effective and responsible adoption.

We aim to:

- **Define and champion** clear AI priorities for VONNE and the wider North East VCSE sector.
- **Promote sector-wide adoption**, enabling all organisations to improve capacity and impact-measurement.
- **Unlock the value of AI** by shaping approaches that deliver meaningful benefits for the sector and the region.

Through our work, we expect to see the following outcomes and impact:

A flourishing VCSE sector that confidently uses AI to amplify its voice, influence commissioning practices, and promotes innovation

Organisations can adopt AI responsibly, guided by strong ethical principles and risk management, ensuring alignment with sector values

A strengthened position for VONNE as a forward-thinking lead within the North East VCSE sector by encouraging AI as a practical and beneficial tool.

Clear channels of open communication, with VONNE being a strong source of information on AI developments and good practice

VONNE's Programmes of Work



Our programmes are diverse — from policy and data, to health and wellbeing, to communications, member services and incubated innovations — yet they are all deeply connected. Each area informs the others, contributing insight, influence and impact that strengthens the whole sector.

Our programmes are designed to interlock, creating a powerful ecosystem where:



Together, this integrated approach helps build a strong, confident, connected VCSE sector, recognised as an essential partner in delivering better outcomes for people and place across the North East.





“ VONNE helps us link in with key strategic conversations across the region. ”

Jon Niblo, Chief Executive
NE Youth

“ VONNE is about being part of something, working with people. It's about getting in meetings with likeminded people...for me, it's about being part of something bigger. ”

Michelle Cooper, Chief Executive
Point North

“ VONNE takes the sector's voice into rooms and networks where it had previously not been heard. ”

North East charity CEO

Why membership matters

VONNE members are at the heart of our new strategy. Developing services for members and increasing membership numbers are priorities. Representing and promoting member interests gives a stronger collective voice for the sector and region.

Supports North East charities and social enterprises with quality services, funding resources, events, networks and discounts.

Builds a strong collective North East VCSE voice with the size of membership enabling powerful advocacy for the sector.

Builds sector intelligence from member data, insights and experiences to shape VONNE's work and influence regional and national policy.

Member Services



Role and Aims

Members shape VONNE, helping us understand sector needs and speak up on its behalf. We support members with services, engagement and connections into our work.

Members say they want to see their views fed into policy and for VONNE to amplify a shared regional voice. On joining, members want advice, support and information.

Through membership we will:

Be inclusive to all membership is free to North East non-profits.

Support a growing and diverse network of North East VCSEs.

Deliver high quality services that strengthen the sector's capacity, capability, and impact.

Enable a collective voice for the sector by connecting member insights across VONNE's workstreams.

Build intelligence from members and services to strengthen the sector's influence.



As a charity, we benefit from all the information and knowledge that VONNE has...we want the representation, networks and knowledge at a regional level that VONNE can provide so that there's a wider impact for the sector



VONNE member

Member Services



Core work and outputs

By providing quality services the team delivers support to North East VCSEs to strengthen their work. We connect members to VONNE's work and build intelligence that equips the sector to shape priorities and influence decisions.

We provide services	We engage with members	We build intelligence
Specialist North East funding information and resources through FINE Funding Information North East project.	Host forums and provide feedback opportunities to hear member views on key issues to inform our work and influence.	Data from services to drive improvements, shape VONNE's work and provide intelligence on and to the sector.
Recruitment services – Job Finder job advertising and Recruitment Support.	Provide peer support, networking and speakers at our Silver and Gold CEO Membership+ Peer Network.	Case studies and insights to spotlight member voices and bring sector needs to life.
Exclusive member content in bulletins, newsletters and member website area.	Collect and share member news through guest blogs and spotlight features.	Accessible intelligence to support stronger VCSE advocacy and action.



Member Services

Over the next five years, we will grow membership to support more North East VCSEs and strengthen the sector's collective voice.

Ambitions, outcomes and impact:

Support more North East VCSEs with high quality services that strengthen the sector.

Grow membership to over 2,000 by 2030 so our collective voice is bigger.

A more influential sector voice with members seeing their impact in our work and influence with regional and national bodies, policy-makers and funders.

Better sector intelligence from collecting and sharing member intelligence that highlights the sector's value, contribution and diversity.



“
We have so
much strength
when we work
together.”

David Smith, former Chief Executive,
Oasis Community Housing

Organogram



To effectively support a growing membership and showcase infrastructure support and the wider role and value of the VCSE sector in the UK, we need to grow our core team. The organogram below illustrates our desired staff team, with adequate funding in place to recruit new roles.



Long term vision and values



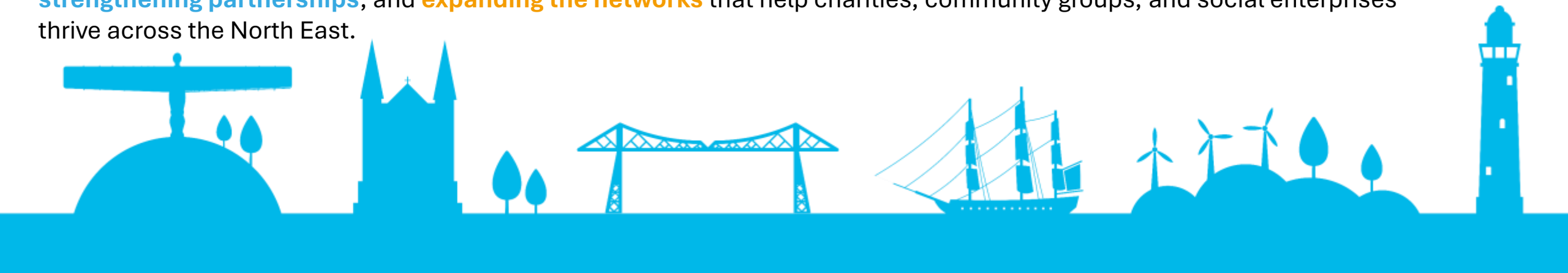
VONNE **champions the VCSE sector** across the North East — and in 2025 we reached a major milestone: over **1,500 members**. It's a reminder of the sector's strength, and a call for us to aim even higher.

Our ambition is simple: **do more, and do it better, with and for the sector**. We already work with partners across and beyond the region — funders, policymakers, delivery partners, community groups — and we know one thing for certain: **none of this can be achieved alone**.

VONNE's power comes from the size and diversity of its membership. We're deliberately built for reach, evidence, and credibility, not profit.

To keep delivering for the sector, we need partners who **believe in the value of a strong, representative VONNE**. Partners who see that **better data, clearer communications, and a louder collective voice** lead to **better policy and greater impact** — locally, regionally, and nationally.

Over the next five years, our strategy is about making this happen: **growing our membership** beyond **2,000 by 2030**, **strengthening partnerships**, and **expanding the networks** that help charities, community groups, and social enterprises thrive across the North East.





www.vonne.org.uk

