



firefighterscharity.org.uk

STRATEGY 2026–2030

Tailored, faster, independent care

**Fire
Fighters
Charity**



Fire Fighters Charity

Where courage meets care.

Fire Fighters Charity is here for every member of the fire services community and their family. We provide clinical care, personal wellbeing and practical support, whenever it is needed.

Contents

Message from our Chair	04
Message from our Chief Executive	06
Working alongside the fire services community	08
Independence and partnership	10
The support we provide	11
Our vision	12
Our long-term ambition	13
Three commitments at the heart of our strategy	14
Five goals toward delivering our long-term ambition	16
The principles that guide us	22
What your support makes possible	24

Message from our Chair

Why this strategy matters



John Baines, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Throughout my career in the fire service, I had the privilege of working alongside extraordinary people. I saw courage, professionalism and commitment every day. I also saw something less visible: the impact that service can have on the health, wellbeing and lives of the people who protect our communities.

Some of those impacts are immediate and obvious. Others emerge later, shaped by demanding work, exposure to trauma, responsibility for others and the pressures that service can place on family life. As leaders, we often focus on operational performance, capability and public safety. Yet all of these ultimately depend upon the wellbeing of our people.

Over recent years, Fire and Rescue Services have made significant progress in recognising and responding to these challenges. Health, wellbeing and trauma support now rightly receive far greater attention than at any point in my career. But no single organisation can meet every need alone. There remains a vital role for trusted, independent support that people can access in confidence when they need it most.

“What began as a benevolent fund has become a specialist provider of healthcare and wellbeing support.”

This is where Fire Fighters Charity has a unique role to play.

For nearly 85 years, the charity has evolved alongside the fire services community it serves. What began as a benevolent fund has become a specialist provider of healthcare and wellbeing support, trusted because it understands the realities of service life and provides care that is tailored, independent and free at the point of need.

I am proud of the progress the charity has made in recent years. More people are accessing support than ever before, and new approaches to digital and community delivery are helping us reach parts of the fire services community that were previously harder to support. Yet despite that progress, the gap between those who need help and those who receive it remains too wide.

This strategy sets out how we will respond to that challenge. It is ambitious, but also grounded in the realities of the community we serve and the needs we see every day. It will help us reach more people, support them earlier, strengthen prevention, build the evidence that improves practice and secure the long-term sustainability needed to serve future generations of the fire services community.

As both a former fire service leader and Chair of Fire Fighters Charity, I firmly believe that everyone in our community should know where to turn when they need support and be able to access timely, trusted and specialist care. This strategy is our commitment to making that a reality.

I hope you will join us in that ambition. Whether through leadership, partnership, advocacy or support, each of us has a role to play in ensuring that the people who dedicate their lives to protecting others receive the care they deserve. Together, we can help shape a future where wellbeing is recognised as fundamental to service and where no member of our community is left to face its challenges alone.

John Baines
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Message from our Chief Executive

A commitment to reach more people, earlier



Sherine Wheeler, Chief Executive

The physical, psychological and social impacts of service in the fire services community can be profound and lifelong, affecting not only those who serve but also the families who stand beside them. These impacts may be immediate or emerge years after service, yet they remain too often underestimated and insufficiently addressed across the wider health and care system.

At the same time, the environment in which the fire services community lives and works is becoming more challenging. Fire and Rescue Services face workforce and financial pressures while responding to increasingly broad operational and community responsibilities. Across the UK, the availability and nature of employer-provided wellbeing support varies considerably, while research shows that stigma, concerns about confidentiality and fear of judgement continue to discourage many from seeking help through workplace routes.

Access to timely health and wellbeing support through the NHS also remains challenging. Long waiting times and high eligibility thresholds mean many people experience delays in receiving the care they need, particularly when specialist support is required.

“
By 2030, Fire Fighters Charity will double the number of people we support.
”

Together, these factors are widening the gap between need and support across the UK fire services community and increasing demand for trusted, independent and specialist health and wellbeing services.

Fire Fighters Charity has responded by expanding its reach by around 40% over the past two years. Yet, despite this significant progress, we are currently meeting only around 15% of estimated annual need. Demand continues to outpace our capacity, leaving too many people without timely access to the support they deserve.

To close that gap, we must evolve. We need to scale our specialist services while maintaining the quality, compassion and independence that define our care. We must strengthen the evidence that underpins our work, invest further in prevention and early intervention, contribute to wider improvements across health and care systems, and build an organisation that is financially and operationally sustainable for the long term.

This strategy sets out how we will do just that.

Our ambition is clear: by 2030, Fire Fighters Charity will double the number of people we support, ensuring that many thousands more members of the UK fire services community can access the specialist, independent and trusted care they need so they can live well and feel valued and recognised for their service.

We stand alongside the fire services community, committed to providing tailored, faster and independent healthcare and wellbeing support, wherever and whenever it is needed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Wheeler'.

Sherine Wheeler
Chief Executive

Working alongside the fire services community

Fire and Rescue Services carry the duty of care for their people, and the sector has done a great deal over the last decade to strengthen occupational health, trauma support and wider workforce wellbeing. We work alongside that provision, not in place of it. What we bring is long experience of the unique health and wellbeing needs created by service, and independent care and support that people can access in confidence.

For nearly 85 years we at Fire Fighters Charity have cared for the fire services community, and for the families who share the weight of this work. Our care is tailored to each individual, free of charge, and without judgement – always.

Our direction sits closely with the way the sector as a whole is moving: towards prevention and earlier intervention, a stronger evidence base, and the coordinated effort of employers, health services and partners. That is the ground this strategy is built on, and where we believe our close relationships with services will create real value across the community.



The community we serve

The fire services community reaches well beyond frontline operational firefighters. It includes control room and support staff, and those many thousands now retired, together with the partners and children who live alongside the demands of the work.

Behind every role is a person, a family and a life outside of the Service. We are here for all of them, at every stage: those serving now, those who have served, and the families who carry the work alongside them.

Altogether that is around 360,000 people, across all four nations and every one of the 52 Fire and Rescue Services. In any given year, we estimate that almost 88,000 of them are likely to need help with their physical health, their mental health or their wider wellbeing.

In 2025/26, our support was there for 13,507 of those individuals – that is roughly 40% more than two years earlier. This is around one in seven of everyone we estimate needs us. We are proud of that progress, and yet the distance between the people who need our care and those who receive it remains far too wide.



The need

This strategy builds on what we see every day across the fire services community: a need that is growing and changing, a system that cannot always meet it, and gaps that we are built to help close.

Need is rising and changing

The effects of service are physical, psychological and social, and they often emerge long after a career has ended.

We see this across the fire services community: injury and the physical demands of the role; trauma that can surface months or years later as post-traumatic stress, anxiety or depression; and the strain that shift patterns and difficult shouts place on relationships, and on the move into retirement. The picture is still developing, particularly around the occupational cancers linked to repeated exposure to contaminants, and around the threats, harassment and abuse online that a rising number of personnel now face.

These pressures are intensifying at a time of smaller workforces, rising costs, wider responsibilities, and an NHS that is harder to reach. The scale and the complexity of need are rising together.

We share a view now widely held across the sector: that this is not only a welfare matter, but a question of operational effectiveness, of retention, and ultimately of public protection. People who can reach the right help early are more likely to stay well, and to stay in service.

Existing provision cannot always meet it

For people who have spent their lives helping others, asking for help can be difficult. Beyond the workplace, rising thresholds and long waits of an overstretched NHS leave many without timely help. And too often support arrives only once a difficulty has become a crisis, rather than early enough to prevent it. So people wait, or go without, at the very moment care matters most.

This is where Fire Fighters Charity plays a unique role. Working alongside employers, occupational health providers and the NHS, we provide trusted, specialist and independent support that people can access in confidence. We often reach individuals sooner than would otherwise be possible, particularly when they need specialist trauma-focused care or other support that can be difficult to access elsewhere.



Independence and partnership

Our independence is one of the most important things we offer. It gives people a trusted route to care outside their Service, where they can ask for help in confidence and without judgement.

Independence does not mean working apart from Fire and Rescue Services. The confidentiality we provide belongs to the individual, whilst we work in partnership with Services and occupational health provision to strengthen and complement existing support.

By sharing insights into emerging needs, trends and where support is and is not reaching people, we help improve understanding, always without compromising the trust someone places in us.

We are the only organisation providing healthcare and wellbeing support nationally, which has been designed entirely around the fire services community and all 52 Fire and Rescue Services. Our care is confidential, free of charge and without judgement – always.



The support we provide

From the point someone joins, through their career, into retirement and the years beyond, we aim to be there, with care shaped around the individual.

For those carrying trauma, there is specialist psychological therapy, and a Crisis Line offering immediate, confidential support at the hardest moments.

For those recovering from injury or illness, there is physical rehabilitation across our centres and online, alongside nursing care for people living with more complex conditions.

For many more, there is the everyday support that helps before a difficulty becomes a crisis: Rest and Recharge breaks, Living Well Groups that rebuild connection in retirement, wellness workshops delivered on station around people's shifts, and resilience sessions for new recruits. Where life becomes hard in other ways, our team provides practical guidance and, for those facing real hardship, financial help.

We deliver this care from three dedicated centres, in Devon, West Sussex and Cumbria, and increasingly through a digital service that reaches people wherever they are. Behind it stand our registered psychological therapists, nurses, physiotherapists, exercise therapists and wellbeing coaches and other talented staff, amounting to 200 in total, and more than 1,200 volunteers across the UK.

Our Service User Experience Panel keeps the lived experience of the community at the centre of how we design it all.

WELLBEING

Our vision is for a future where every member of the fire services community lives well, and feels valued and recognised.

Our long-term ambition

To contribute to that vision, Fire Fighters Charity will champion the fire services community across the UK and provide timely, tailored, independent healthcare and wellbeing support, both during and after service, always.

We want Fire Fighters Charity to become the trusted independent partner for health and wellbeing across the UK fire services community, combining deep community relationships, specialist care, prevention, leading expertise and a growing evidence base to improve lives and help shape the future of support during service and long after it.

We want everyone who serves, or has served, in the fire services community to know where to turn when they need support and to be able to access timely, trusted and specialist care.

Alongside providing that care, we will help shape a future in which prevention, early intervention and evidence-based support become increasingly embedded across the fire services community.

This strategy represents the next stage of that journey.

Three commitments at the heart of our strategy

Our strategy is deliberate and focused. Need is rising while existing routes cannot meet it

By 2030, we will narrow the gap between need and support by expanding access to trusted, independent care, strengthening prevention and early intervention, growing digital and community delivery, building the evidence that improves practice and securing the long-term sustainability of the charity.

By 2030, we will have taken significant steps towards our long-term ambition through three strategic commitments.

2030 Commitments

At the heart of this strategy are three commitments.

Double our reach.

By 2030 we will support more than 27,000 people every year, around 30% of everyone we estimate needs us, up from around 15% today.

Reach financial break-even by 2030.

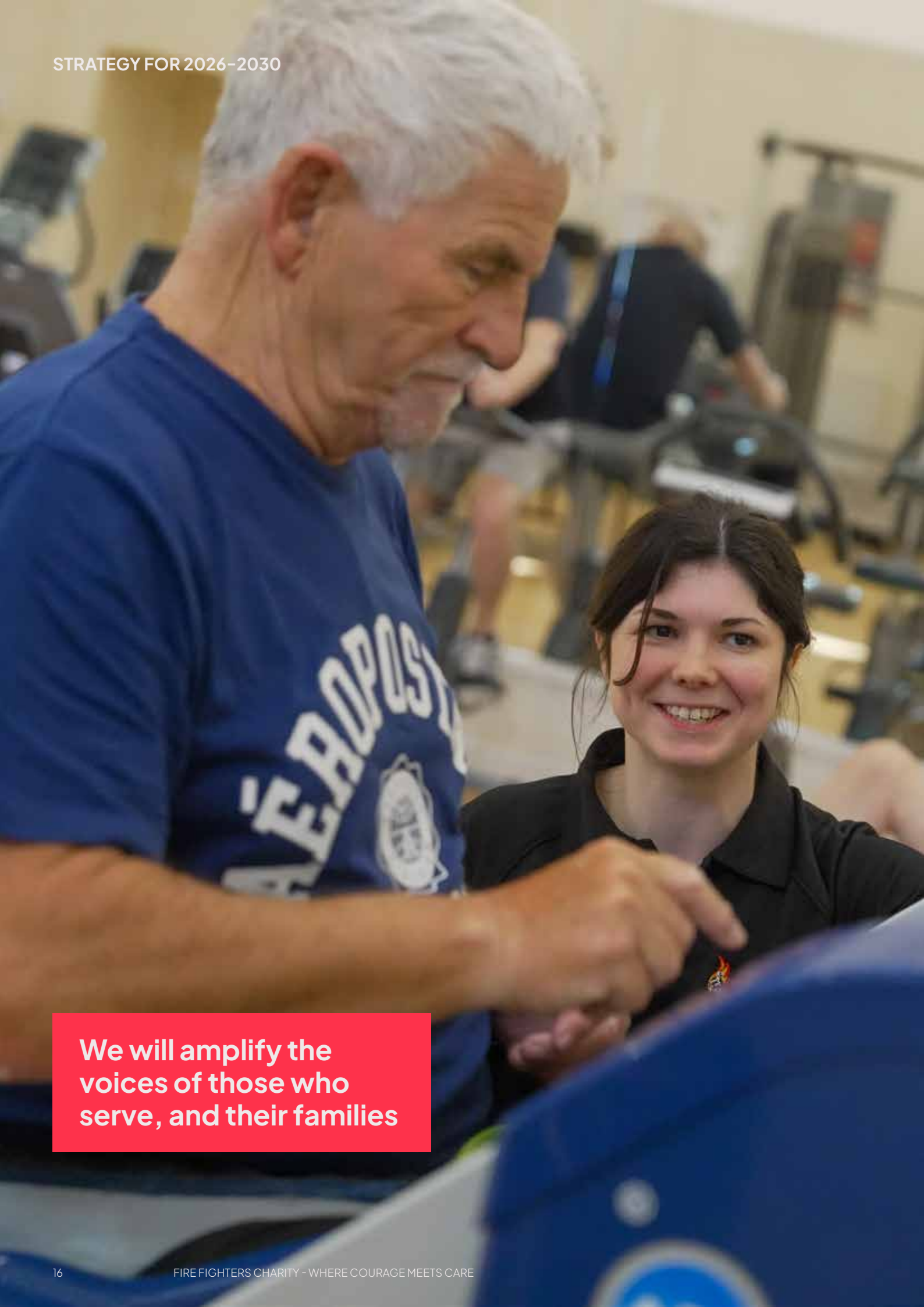
We will continue to grow both voluntary and earned income, improve productivity, and bring our cost base into balance with income, so that our growth is sustainable.

Build the evidence that improves practice.

We will strengthen our understanding of need, measure our reach and impact, contribute to research and share knowledge that improves outcomes across the fire services community.



By 2030, we
aim to support
27,000
people every year



We will amplify the voices of those who serve, and their families

Five goals toward delivering our long-term ambition

Together, these goals provide the foundations on which our long-term ambition will be achieved. They depend on each other: we cannot scale our reach without evidence, or sustain either without financial balance. For each goal, we set out what it means and the objectives that will achieve it.

01

GOAL 1: The fire services community at the heart

Everything we do starts with the fire services community.

This goal is about becoming closer to the community we serve and connecting with them through deepened understanding of the needs of those we support, strengthen our relationship with Fire and Rescue Services, and ensure our services remain relevant and accessible. We will also grow public understanding of fire-specific health and wellbeing needs, whilst amplifying the voices of those we are here to serve.

How we will achieve this goal across 2026–2030:

— **Understanding and meeting Fire and Rescue Services’ needs:** we will work to get closer to each Fire and Rescue Service as a partner, so we understand what they need from us and can shape our offer accordingly.

- **Effective engagement with Fire and Rescue Services:** we will strengthen how we manage, monitor and report on our relationships with each Fire and Rescue Service.
- **Advocacy model:** we will develop and deliver a clearer approach to amplifying the voices of those who serve and their families, so the charity speaks with them rather than for them.
- **Local and regional approaches:** we will strengthen our connection with the fire services community at a regional level, through volunteering and other routes, so we are known, trusted and visible across the UK.
- **Relevant and accessible to key audiences:** we will make the charity easier to find, understand and approach, through a refreshed brand, a materially improved website, and better digital and social content.
- **Raising awareness and understanding of our cause:** we will run campaigns to grow public understanding of fire-specific health and wellbeing needs.

02

GOAL 2: Becoming more evidence-led

We want our decisions, services and partnerships to be grounded in the best available evidence. This goal is about building our capacity to understand healthcare and wellbeing needs in our community as they change, measuring our reach and impact, and contributing to research that shapes good practice across the sector.

How we will achieve this goal across 2026–2030:

- **Understanding our reach and the remaining gap:** we will build a clear, current picture of who we support, who we do not yet reach, and where the gap between our reach and estimated need is widest.
- **Measuring our impact:** we will develop the frameworks, tools and habits that tell us whether our support is working, and for whom.
- **Collaborating on research to influence good practice:** we will partner with academia and others to generate new evidence about fire-specific health and wellbeing and influence how that evidence is adopted across the sector.
- **Transforming data, analysis and insight:** we will modernise our systems, data and governance that everything else depends on, and strengthen how we turn data into insight people can act on.

03

GOAL 3: Transforming healthcare and wellbeing support

We are committed to improving the quality, accessibility and range of support we provide. This goal is about reaching more of the fire services community, deepening our clinical and therapeutic competence, and making the experience of accessing support as straightforward and supportive as possible.

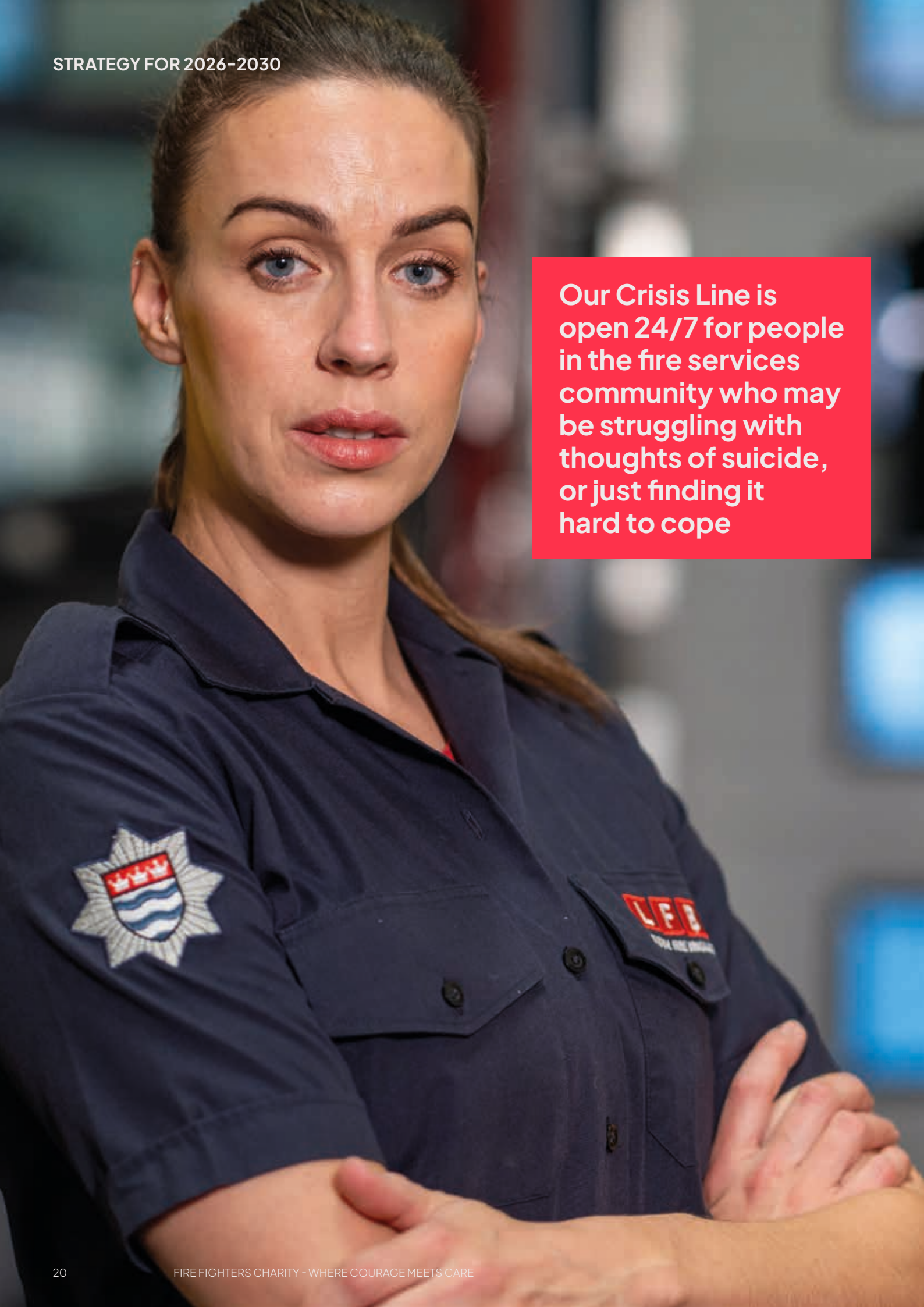
How we will achieve this goal across 2026–2030:

- **Scaling our reach:** we will grow the number of people we support each year, with particular focus on psychological care, where demand and complexity are rising fastest.
- **Deepening our competence:** we will strengthen the clinical and therapeutic expertise within the charity, supported by robust clinical governance, supervision and safeguarding frameworks.
- **Improving service user experience:** we will make it easier and quicker for people to access the right support, with clearer pathways, better navigation and joined-up operations behind the scenes.

We are committed to making our care and support more relevant and accessible



Behind our care and support are nearly
200
dedicated employees
and more than
1,200
incredible volunteers
across the UK



Our Crisis Line is open 24/7 for people in the fire services community who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide, or just finding it hard to cope



2,164 individuals received physical care and support

04

GOAL 4: Preventing poor health and wellbeing

Providing care when someone is already injured or unwell is vital. So is preventing poor health and wellbeing in the first place. This goal is about better information, advice and early support, so people can navigate what is available, from us and others, and get help sooner.

How we will achieve this goal across 2026–2030:

- **Early access to care and support:** we will work to reach people sooner, before problems escalate. This includes our Crisis Line, which offers immediate, confidential support at the hardest moments, and a new service for those experiencing threats, harassment and abuse online, a harm the fire services community faces in growing numbers.
- **Information, advice and navigation:** we will give the fire services community clear, trusted information and advice, and make it genuinely intuitive to find the right help, through a new digital support finder and a rationalised portfolio of digital tools that support people to look after their own health and wellbeing.

05

GOAL 5: Achieving financial sustainability

Being there for everyone who needs us, for the long term, means running a resilient organisation. We will continue to grow and diversify our income so that we depend less on any single source, use every pound as effectively as we can, and hold ourselves to high standards of governance, with the aim of reaching financial break-even by 2030.

How we will achieve this goal across 2026–2030:

- **Growing the generosity behind us:** we will grow income from public supporters, major donors, trusts and foundations, and community fundraising, and make it easier for people to give in the ways that suit them.
- **Growing the income we earn ourselves:** we will continue to expand the commercial and trading activity that diversifies our funding and reduces our reliance on donations alone.
- **Running ourselves well:** we will use every pound effectively, invest in the people and systems our care depends on, and maintain strong governance, so the charity is sustainable and trusted for the long term.

The principles that guide us

These principles will guide us and the choices we make whenever priorities compete.

Prevention alongside treatment.

We will increasingly focus on helping people before physical or psychological difficulties become crises.

Digital and community delivery alongside our centres.

Our centres remain at the heart of what we do, but future growth will come primarily through digital, and community-based support, reaching more people, closer to home.

Partnership before duplication.

We will work hand in hand with Fire and Rescue Services, occupational health teams and partners, strengthening, rather than replacing support already available.



Looking beyond 2030

By 2030, we aim to support more than 27,000 people every year, operate on a financially sustainable basis and play a leading role in building the evidence that improves practice.

Beyond 2030, our ambition is broader still.

We want a future in which every member of the fire services community knows where to turn when they need support, can access timely and specialist care, and benefits from a sector that increasingly understands, prevents and responds to the lifelong impacts of service.

We want Fire Fighters Charity to be recognised as the trusted independent partner for health and wellbeing across the fire services community, helping shape a future in which nobody faces the impacts of service without knowing where to turn for help, and where timely, trusted support is within reach wherever needed.

What your support makes possible

Everything in this strategy depends on the support of the fire services community and those who stand with it.

“
I knew about the charity but never thought it applied to me. I could not believe the support.
”



Gill Crow
Former Control Officer

Partnership

Our approach is founded on the belief that the greatest impact is achieved through partnership. We will deepen our relationships with Fire and Rescue Services and other key sector partners to create a more connected system of support – one that enables earlier identification of need, improves access to help, and reaches those who might otherwise remain underserved.

Success will be measured not simply by the services we provide, but by the extent to which wellbeing support is embedded, understood and accessible across the fire and rescue community: understood, accessible and trusted by serving personnel, on-call firefighters, retirees and families alike. Together, we will be able to promote a culture in which seeking help is encouraged, support is easy to access, and intervention occurs before challenges become crises.





How we are supported

For most of our history, the fire services community has funded much of its own care. Around four-fifths of our income still comes from the generosity of supporters, most of them part of that community, through fundraising, events, and the activity that so many stations already lead. It is a loyal base, and a narrow one, so part of this strategy is about broadening it. In addition, we are working to grow the income we earn ourselves, through commissioned services and practical commercial arrangements such as parcel lockers and textile recycling on stations, so that we rely less on any single source.

We have made real progress. Building on significant strides over the last two years, we are growing both voluntary and earned income, improving how we work, and bringing our cost base into balance, with the aim of reaching financial break-even by 2030. Every pound is put to work reaching more people. However you choose to be part of that – through partnership, fundraising or commissioning – you help keep this care sustainable, so that it is still here long into the future for the people who will need it then.

Join us

The people who serve in the fire services community carry real, and often hidden, costs on behalf of everyone else. This strategy is our commitment to ensuring that fewer of them face those costs without support, and we are stronger with you alongside us.

Give them the care their courage deserves.



firefighterscharity.org.uk SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE



Where courage meets care.