



firefighterscharity.org.uk

STRATEGY 2026–2030

Give the fire services community
the care their courage deserves.

**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.

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Foreword

Every day, across the UK, members of the fire services community step forward when others step back. They run towards danger, comfort people in their darkest moments, witness events most of us will never experience, and carry responsibilities that extend far beyond the end of a shift. And while communities see the courage it takes to do the job, they do not always see the personal cost.



The effects of working in fire and rescue often last long after an incident is over. Physical injuries, trauma, anxiety, illness, relationship pressures and the challenges of retirement can emerge months or even years later. These impacts do not affect firefighters alone; they are felt by fire and rescue service colleagues working with them, as well as all their families, partners and children, who serve alongside them in their own way. Every person behind the uniform deserves support, understanding and somewhere to turn when life becomes difficult.

For nearly 85 years, Fire Fighters Charity has been that place. We have stood beside generations of firefighters, control staff, support staff, retirees and family members, helping people recover, rebuild and thrive. We are here because those who spend their lives protecting others deserve expert care when they need it themselves.

Today, that need has never been clearer. The demands placed upon the fire services community are growing, while access to timely support is becoming harder for many. But we are also seeing reasons for hope. More people are recognising the importance of wellbeing, seeking help earlier, and embracing new ways to access support.

This strategy is our commitment to meet that moment.

Over the period to 2030, we will reach more people, provide support earlier, strengthen our specialist care and build a more sustainable charity for the future. Most importantly, we will continue to place the fire services community at the heart of everything we do.

None of this happens without the generosity of those who believe that courage deserves care. To our supporters, volunteers, fundraisers, partners and donors, thank you. Your support changes lives every day. And to everyone who serves, has served, or loves someone who serves: this charity is here for you.

Together, we can ensure that nobody in the fire services community faces life's challenges alone.

Sherine Wheeler
Chief Executive

John Baines
Chair of the
Board of Trustees



“
Your support
changes lives
every day.
”

Where courage meets care

Every day, people across the fire services community face situations most of us hope never to encounter.

In protecting others, they are exposed to experiences that can leave lasting physical, psychological and social effects, sometimes immediately, sometimes years after a career has ended.

Behind every uniform is a person, a family and a life beyond work. Our role is to stand beside them with expert, compassionate care that helps them recover, rebuild and live well.

For nearly 85 years we have done exactly that. This strategy sets out how we will reach many more people, much earlier, and how you can help make that possible.



The people we are here for

The fire services community stretches far beyond the frontline operational firefighter. It includes the control room operators who hold a caller's panic steady while help is on its way, the on-call crews who leave their day jobs at the sound of a pager, the support staff who keep services running, and the many thousands who have given years to this work and are now retired. It includes their partners and their children, the families who live with the shift patterns, the missed moments and, sometimes, the after-effects that come home too.

Altogether, that is around 360,000 people, across all four nations of the UK and every one of our 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. It was a landmark year, and one we are proud of, but every one of those numbers represents someone who has spent their career protecting others. Our ambition is to ensure far more of them receive the care they deserve.



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 harm done by a life in fire and rescue rarely announces itself at the time; it accumulates, and it surfaces differently for different people.

There is the physical toll of injuries and of demanding work, alongside a growing body of evidence linking firefighting to occupational cancers caused by repeated exposure to smoke and contaminants. The psychological toll can be harder to see, as the trauma of witnessing what others never have to surfaces months or even years later as post-traumatic stress, anxiety or depression. And there is a social toll, quieter but no less serious, as the strain of shift work and trauma falls on relationships and the loss of identity and routine shapes the move into retirement. To all of this a newer harm has been added, with members of the fire services community increasingly targeted by threats, harassment and abuse online.

These pressures are intensifying on every side. Fire and Rescue Services now operate with smaller workforces, rising costs and expanding responsibilities, from climate-driven floods and wildfires to medical co-responding, while the NHS, under its own strain, grows harder to reach. The cost-of-living pressures felt across the country fall on fire families too, so that the scale and the complexity of need are rising together.

Existing provision cannot always meet it

For someone who has spent a career being the one others depend on, the workplace is not always where they feel able to admit they are struggling, however strong their employer's support, and beyond it the rising thresholds and long waiting lists of an overstretched NHS leave many without timely help. So people wait, or go without, at the very moment that care matters most.

This is the gap that no single part of the system is designed to fill, but it is the reason we exist. Working alongside employers and the NHS, we reach people quickly, often far sooner than they could be seen elsewhere, particularly for the specialist, trauma-focused care that is hardest to find.



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.

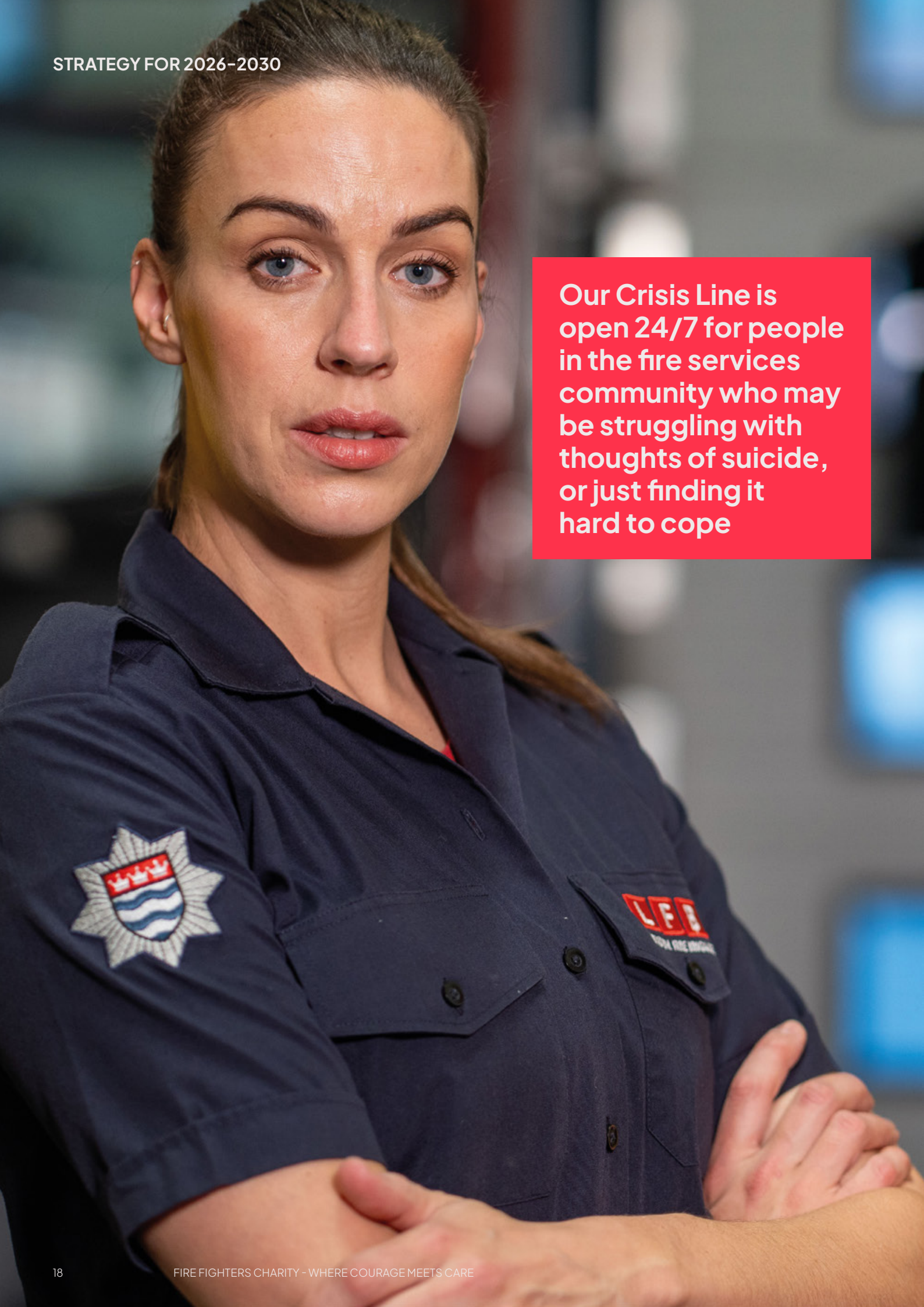
How we will achieve this goal across 2026-2030:

- **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



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 those who stand with those whose courage deserves our care.

The need for healthcare and wellbeing support that is tailored, faster and independent is outpacing our ability to rise to meet it. That is why we are asking you to stand with the fire services community by supporting Fire Fighters Charity.

You do not have to have served to help those who do. Everything we do is made possible by people who choose to stand with this community, and there are many ways to do so.

You can give, once or regularly, knowing your support funds specialist care that is free at the point of need for those who have served us all. You can fundraise where you are, as thousands already do, from station car washes to Fire Family Fundraisers.

If you represent an employer, a funder or a Fire and Rescue Service, you can partner with us, commission our support for your people, or champion this cause within your organisation.

You can talk about our work, because for a community whose hardest struggles are so often hidden, simply knowing that independent, confidential, judgement-free help exists can be the thing that changes, or saves, a life.

Some choose to help in a way that lasts beyond a lifetime, leaving a gift in their Will to pass on something enduring to the fire services community, and such gifts make a remarkable amount of our care possible.

Whatever form it takes, your support closes the distance between the people who need our care and the people who receive it.

Join us

Those who serve in the fire services community have unique health and wellbeing needs because of their service. We can all stand alongside them.

Give them the care their



firefighterscharity.org.uk

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE



Where courage meets care.