



ONE CREW, ONE PLAN: RNLI 2026–30

WHY WE NEED TO EVOLVE
WHAT WE NEED TO DO
HOW WE'LL MAKE IT HAPPEN

SEPTEMBER 2025



Contents

1. Leading the way to 2040	4
2. Why do we need to evolve?	7
3. What do we need to do?	11
4. How are we going to deliver this plan?	18

In the 201 years since the RNLI was founded, we have saved more than 146,000 lives. This has, in turn, resulted in 4M lives lived by those we have rescued and their descendants*. This represents an extraordinary contribution by the RNLI to our society and the countries and communities we proudly serve. Powered by the courage, selfless commitment and dedication of our people, and funded by the generosity of the public – who so thoughtfully give their money to us in trust – the RNLI is an organisation cherished by our nations and depended upon by those who need us most.

However, the nature of lifesaving at sea has changed profoundly in recent years. More often than not, we are now rescuing people who begin onshore and get into difficulty, rather than the professional mariners shipwrecked or sinking offshore we once saved. Today, 98% of all our launches are to incidents within 10 miles of the shore. As those who have come before us have done, on our watch, we must evolve and adapt over the next 15 years to ensure that we continue to fulfil our vital purpose, to save lives at sea and remain sustainable into the future. Mindful of our heritage, we must look forward and focus our effort and investment on those activities which will have the greatest impact on our mission.

Under this plan, we will provide a layered and better integrated lifesaving capability. So we will start onshore and work outwards, with water safety initiatives in our inland – as well as coastal – communities. There will be enhancements to our lifeguard capabilities and facilities; and we will bring more modern and effective day and night coastal lifesaving assets into service. This is all whilst rationalising and, where appropriate, exiting our legacy all-weather lifeboat classes. We will work at pace to upgrade the conditions, material state and amenities in our lifeboat stations and lifeguard units – improving the experience for all. The way in which the Lifeboat Support Centre and our regional staff operate will shift to being even more focused on serving the needs of frontline lifesavers and volunteers. We will simplify and rationalise processes, in recognition of a need to value better our volunteers' precious time, to improve organisational efficiency, and to translate our donors' generosity into lifesaving impact more readily.



This is an ambitious plan and an incredibly exciting moment in the history of this remarkable Institution. To deliver it we will need to unite, in common purpose, and as One Crew pull together. I have been inspired and encouraged by all the amazing people who I have met in my first year in post and I have real confidence that everyone who is part of the RNLI – who loves, supports and depends upon us – wants us to be even better tomorrow, than we are today.

Whatever your role in delivering One Crew, One Plan and enabling us to realise our vision for the future, thank you for your passion, talent and kindness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Sparkes".

Peter Sparkes
RNLI Chief Executive

* 2025 report compiled by The Worshipful Company of Actuaries for the RNLI. Figure estimated using analysis based on lives saved data and number of descendants born following a life saved.



Our purpose

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

Our vision

To save every one

Our values

Courageous, dependable, selfless, trustworthy

Whoever we are Wherever we are from

We are one crew

Ready to save lives

We're powered by passion **talent** and **kindness**

Like generations of selfless lifesavers before us

This is our watch

We lead the way

Valuing each other Trusting each other **Depending on one another**

Volunteering to face the storm together

Knowing that **with courage nothing is impossible**

That is what has always driven us
to save every one we can

It's what makes every one of us

a lifesaver

Leading the way to 2040

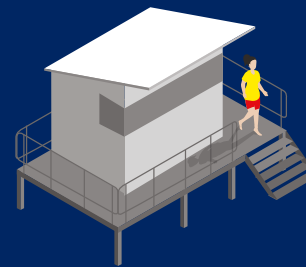
How should the RNLI operate in the future, if we're going to save more lives in a changing world?

What is it about our charity that we need to protect – and what do we need to evolve? What do we need to do to secure our future, and the futures of thousands of people who will need our lifeguards, lifeboat crews and water safety work?

This plan aims to address these challenges and answer those questions. Building on our 201-year history of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, it sets out the next chapter. You'll read about how the RNLI will ensure we are ready to save even more lives at sea over the next 15 years and beyond – and what we will do between now and 2030 to help get us there.

LIFESAVING EFFECT

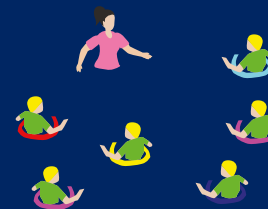
The RNLI will continue – and evolve – its three key ways of saving lives:



LIFEGUARDS



LIFEBOATS



WATER SAFETY



RNLI 2040: our evolution

How does the RNLI need to operate in the future, to save more lives in a changing world?



An updated lifeboat fleet, ready for the increased number of nearshore rescues – including a new class of coastal lifeboats.

Rescue services that work with each other more closely: lifeboats, lifeguards, coastguard and other emergency services, saving lives together safely.

Digitally-enabled lifesaving that simplifies our digital services and harnesses new technologies, such as sensors and remote monitoring of our lifeboats.



Better support for volunteers and frontline lifesavers so that they can focus on their lifesaving work and come home safely.

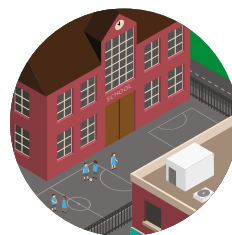
Volunteer and frontline lifesaver roles that are more inclusive and flexible, so that more people want to become – and stay – part of the RNLI.

Everyone sees safety as their responsibility.



Lifeboat stations and lifeguard units that are fit for purpose – with modernised facilities that meet the needs of our people and their communities (from lifesavers and those they rescue, to those in need of safety advice).

A reduced impact on the environment with increased resilience around climate change.



Partnering and influencing work that ensures domestic and international drowning prevention is well-resourced in high-priority locations – with all children in the UK and Ireland knowing about water safety.



A sustainable financial outlook – spending the money given to us in trust wisely, better looking after our supporters and diversifying our income streams.

Why do we need to evolve?

Our purpose is to save lives at sea. Our vision is to save every one. All the while, we strive to stay true to our values: courageous, dependable, selfless and trustworthy.

But we can't deliver on that purpose, pursue that vision, or live those values without evolving – not in a world that continues to change so much, and so rapidly.

So, what is changing and how does it affect the RNLI?

People

- The coast is being used in different ways – which means new risks. 1 in 4 children leave primary school unable to swim in the UK* and 1 in 4 Irish adults can't swim**.
- There is an increasing demand for our vital lifesaving services, while our lifesavers are facing more challenges, including incidents involving vulnerable people.
- Drowning is a complex, changing problem that is not always a priority for decision makers. Around 300,000 people drown worldwide each year***.
- Only around 1 in 10 people who join lifeboat crews have professional maritime backgrounds.
- People's expectations of volunteering – and how much time they can offer – are shifting.
- The populations of the UK and Ireland are becoming more diverse, along with the needs of our volunteers, staff, supporters and those we rescue.
- Rapid changes in technology have created new opportunities for how and where we do our work.

*Source: Royal Life Saving Society UK, 2022

**Source: Ireland National Swimming Strategy, 2024

***Global Health Estimates 2024, World Health Organization

Charity

- The challenging economic climate has driven up inflation and the cost of operations, while the fundraising environment has become more competitive.
- Increasing regulation and compliance requirements have meant more costs for charities.
- Shifting legal requirements and social expectations provide a constant need for charities to change their ways of working and update their policies and procedures. This often results in increased costs.
- In an unpredictable world, society is increasingly polarised, bringing challenges such as antisocial behaviour, which we must address to protect our people and reputation.



Environment

- The climate is changing in many ways, including rising sea levels, erosion, flooding, and heatwaves.
- This is all affecting coastal infrastructure, landscapes, hazards and sea use. More frequent heatwaves and warmer, drier summers are driving increased use of beaches and coastal waters.
- Drowning prevention has a higher profile internationally as the effects of climate change and public health are increasingly part of the global agenda.
- Decarbonisation, plastic reduction and water quality are examples of areas where organisations need to meet changing public and regulatory expectations.

What do we need to do?

We have set three long-term goals, which describe what the RNLI aims to achieve in order to continue fulfilling our lifesaving purpose in a changing world:

Goal 1:



TO CONTINUE TO BE
AN INDEPENDENT, VOLUNTEERING
CHARITY AND WORLD-RENOWNED
RESCUE SERVICE

Goal 2:



TO DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE,
FUTURE-FIT LIFESAVING SERVICE

Goal 3:



TO BE AN INFLUENCER AND CATALYST
FOR DROWNING PREVENTION GLOBALLY,
NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

Each goal has a set of strategic objectives for 2026–30, which will guide the decisions we make and where we focus our effort. Each objective aligns to a set of measurable outcomes. These are our criteria for success that we will monitor to ensure our plan is on track.

Goal 1:

TO CONTINUE TO BE
AN INDEPENDENT, VOLUNTEERING
CHARITY AND WORLD-RENOWNED
RESCUE SERVICE

Objectives:

Strategic objective 1.1

We will save lives in, on and around the water by delivering a **safer and more effective lifeboat and lifeguard service**

Strategic objective 1.2

We will sustain a safer, more effective and inclusive One Crew by attracting and retaining volunteers and staff who are set up with **the right skills, training and equipment**

Strategic objective 1.3

We will maintain the RNLI's status as an independent lifesaving charity by **raising funds from a more diverse range of income streams**

Strategic objective 1.4

We will safeguard the RNLI's licence to operate in the communities we serve by **managing our reputation and ensuring more effective governance of our services**

Strategic objective 1.5

We will ensure donors' money is spent wisely by delivering services that provide **improved value for money**

Outcomes:

Fewer lives lost
Improved lifesaving service readiness
Our people are safer

Improved lifesaving service resilience
More positive RNLI experience
Our people are safer

Improved funding resilience

More effective governance

Improved value for money

Measures*:

Lives saved
Service availability
Injury rate

Trained lifesavers
Volunteer/staff engagement score
Injury rate

Income pipeline health

Policy management

Delivery to plan

*From 2026, annual monitoring of these outcome measures will be supported by monthly tracking of leading key performance indicators through a balanced scorecard

Activities:

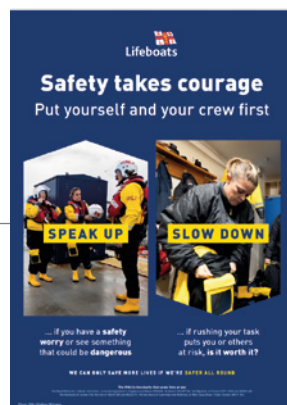
Goal 1:



**TO CONTINUE TO BE
AN INDEPENDENT, VOLUNTEERING
CHARITY AND WORLD-RENOWNED
RESCUE SERVICE**

Upgrading lifeguard and lifeboat facilities

Our lifesaving facilities are in locations exposed to harsh weather and sea conditions. The needs of the people who use those facilities are changing – and so is the climate they operate in. So, where possible, we need to retrofit and refurbish lifeboat stations so they are right for our people and lifesaving assets. That includes ensuring the provision of private changing rooms in all existing and new stations. Many of our lifeguard units need to be replaced entirely, as they have reached the end of their operational life.



Keeping our people safe and saving lives with the right skills and equipment

When it comes to safety, we will have the courage to put ourselves and each other first – because if we are at risk of harm, our lifesaving mission is at risk too. There are a variety of systems, ways of working and projects that will make our people – and those they rescue – safer all round. We will embed the new Operational Competence Framework and Safety Management System, with improved training on mental health, antisocial behaviour, casualty care and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This training will be more accessible to volunteers as part of a wider strategy to improve the volunteer experience. Meanwhile, a new inshore rescue hovercraft will ensure our crews have the right replacement to launch to the rescue.

Generating income and spending it wisely

In order to secure the income needed to realise our 2040 aims, our fundraising strategy includes recruiting thousands of new supporters and treating them amazingly well. We will also need support from new partners, and to grow income through our online retail operations. We will continue to ensure we spend our donors' money wisely, finding opportunities to be more cost effective. For example, we will rationalise our estate and use more commercial off-the-shelf solutions such as modular buildings.





Objectives:

Outcomes:

Measures*:

Strategic objective 2.1

By 2030 we will have started to **modernise the lifesaving service** to better meet the changing profile of lifesaving demand and the changing needs of our frontline lifesavers

Fewer lives lost
Improved lifesaving service resilience

Lives saved
Trained lifesavers

Strategic objective 2.2

By 2030 we will be making better use of our people's time and donors' money by moving to a **service-led operating model that is more efficient and effective**

More positive RNLI experience
Improved value for money

Volunteer/staff engagement score
Delivery to plan

Strategic objective 2.3

By 2030 we will have a more integrated approach to **growing our relevance with the next generation of RNLI lifesavers and supporters**

Greater audience relevance and brand health

Brand Health Index

Strategic objective 2.4

By 2030 we will have improved our climate resilience and **reduced our environmental impact** by making progress against our environmental goals

Improved lifesaving service readiness
Improved environmental sustainability
More effective governance

Service availability
Carbon footprint
Policy management

*From 2026, annual monitoring of these outcome measures will be supported by monthly tracking of leading key performance indicators through a balanced scorecard

Activities:

Goal 2:

TO DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE,
FUTURE-FIT LIFESAVING SERVICE

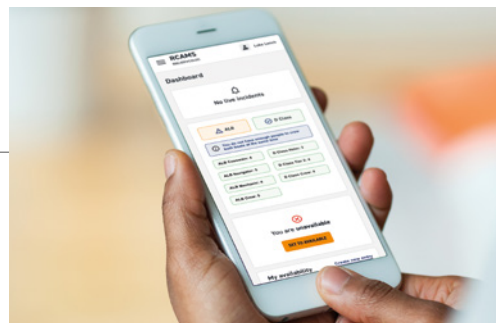
Modernised lifesaving

A new class will join our fleet - the coastal lifeboat - as part of a lifeboat fleet ready for more nearshore rescues. Following the procurement of a prototype, we aim to have the first coastal lifeboat on service in 2028. Meanwhile, work to retrofit our Atlantic 85 lifeboats will deliver improved ergonomics, seating configuration and digital connectivity. In both cases, volunteer involvement will bring the benefits of their frontline experience to the fleet modernisation. We will continue to work with lifesaving communities to ensure the right lifeboats are in the right locations – assets that use our donors' money in the best way, to achieve the best lifesaving effect.



Digitally-enabled lifesaving

We will improve the capturing, processing and recording of lifeguard data, by using digital devices on-site and lifeguard unit cameras. Digital systems will evolve to provide a single source of reliable data and make life easier for frontline lifesavers and volunteers. Our core business IT systems will transition to new, modernised systems that keep the charity running, improve the experience of frontline lifesavers and volunteers, and drive more efficient ways of working.



Future-fit lifesaving

We will engage a new generation of supporters with the RNLI, with opportunities including the 25th anniversaries of lifeguards (2026) and Thames lifeboats (2027) to help with the ongoing relevance and reach of the charity. As we mark this milestone for lifeguards we will also be looking ahead to opportunities for future evolutions through the development and implementation of a new Lifeguard Strategy. We will also become more environmentally sustainable. This will be achieved by using low-carbon fuel, retro-fitting renewables and switching to electric vehicles in the car fleet.



Goal 3:



TO BE AN INFLUENCER AND CATALYST FOR DROWNING PREVENTION GLOBALLY, NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

Objectives:	Outcomes:	Measures*:
Strategic objective 3.1 By 2030 there will be more evidence to demonstrate the impact of water safety interventions developed and deployed with and through others	More impactful water safety partnerships Fewer serious water-related incidents	Sharing lifesaving expertise Water safety awareness Serious water incidents
Strategic objective 3.2 By 2030 we will have influenced decision-making organisations to increase the prioritisation and resourcing of drowning prevention in high-risk locations and for high-risk groups	Greater prioritisation of drowning prevention Fewer serious water-related incidents	Influencing global decision makers Serious water incidents

*From 2026, annual monitoring of these outcome measures will be supported by monthly tracking of leading key performance indicators through a balanced scorecard

Activities:

Goal 3:

TO BE AN INFLUENCER AND CATALYST
FOR DROWNING PREVENTION
GLOBALLY, NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

Working with partners

We will explore opportunities to work with new and existing partners on innovative ways to keep people safe in and around water, for example, using technology. Meanwhile, we will continue to work with existing partner organisations such as the Black Swimming Association and the GAA (Ireland's largest sporting body) on interventions that are already having an impact (such as the Float to Live campaign). Internationally, that will include continued drowning prevention interventions in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Tanzania. For example, in Bangladesh, new approaches will be piloted to reduce drowning risk for children under 2 years old. This is fully funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research, and will be delivered in collaboration with the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh and other partners.



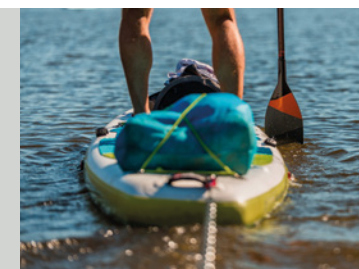
Influence and advocacy

This will be at a global level, through work such as our continued collaboration with the World Health Organization. We will also work to ensure that drowning prevention is embedded in any updates to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (which run to 2030). In the UK and Ireland, we will develop water safety influence and advocacy plans with national water safety forums. We will also continue to play our part in World Drowning Prevention Day each year. This is an important opportunity to raise awareness of drowning prevention in the UK, Ireland and globally.



Evidence and insight

Our water safety work will benefit from evidence and insight showing how and why people get into danger in the water. We will regularly review our insight into high-risk locations and groups, drawing on a range of sources and working in partnership with other organisations on our response. It will all help inform our continued delivery of targeted local, regional and national water safety initiatives in the UK and Ireland.



How are we going to deliver this plan?

Crew, lifeguards, volunteers, donors,
staff and partners will be able to
SAVE MORE LIVES
if we provide

SIMPLIFIED

processes and operations,
adopting industry standards
to ensure everyone is **safer**

SUPPORT

services that are geared towards
better-serving the needs of
volunteers and lifesavers

How will we improve the support to our frontline services?

To ensure we meet the needs of our lifesavers and volunteers, we will shift to a service-led operating model.

That will make it easier for volunteers and frontline lifesavers to access the services and information they need.

But improving our frontline services is impossible without improvements to the back-office functions supporting them. So we will simplify our processes and governance, supported by technology, to ensure that our services are effective and easy to use.



How will we digitally transform the RNLI?

We must utilise existing and emerging technology to enhance how our people provide lifesaving services.

We already use digital solutions and technology extensively – we need to continually evolve them in line with emerging needs, and ensure we're making the best use of supporter funds.

In the short term, we will be addressing any risks created by existing technology becoming obsolete. And we'll make some smaller-scale changes to improve people's experience of our current tools and systems. Over the long term, we will make some strategic changes that create an information architecture for the RNLI that is fit for the future.

Over the next 5 years, activities will include:

- Designing our processes to ensure we are able to deliver services quickly and effectively, and then enhance those processes with appropriate technology
- Targeted improvements to the user experience for volunteers and staff
- Building the underpinning technology architecture to enable more agile adoption of new technology
- Providing new core platforms for Finance, People, Engineering and Lifesaving Operations teams, adopting industry-standard core processes where possible
- Safely and securely exploring AI and other innovations to deliver our 2030 goals.

How will we manage our estate?

Maintaining and upgrading the RNLI estate will be a key focus in the next 5 years.

Whenever possible, we will use commercial off-the-shelf solutions, from pontoons and maritime infrastructure to lifeboat stations. This new approach will enable projects to move from concept to delivery more quickly, as well as being more cost effective than traditional construction methods.

In 2025 we implemented a new Estates Management System, which we will continue to deploy and roll out over the next few years. This system will give a view of all property interests and build the ability for volunteers to raise repairs and view core documents in real time. It will also support and

enable the tracking of compliance tasks, management of condition surveys with their resulting actions, and oversight of construction projects and programmes.

Facilities that enhance the volunteer experience will be prioritised – especially when it comes to creating a safe and inclusive environment for our people. This includes the provision of private changing facilities and a Property Maintenance Strategy which will ensure all of our buildings are safe and compliant.



The ageing, exposed boathouse at Kirkcudbright, Dumfries, pictured before a replacement station was built as part of the RNLI's estates plan

98%
OF LAUNCHES
ARE LESS THAN

10 NAUTICAL MILES
OFFSHORE

1.8%
ARE BETWEEN

10NM AND 25NM
OFFSHORE

0.2%
INCIDENTS ARE

MORE THAN
25NM OFFSHORE



How will we evolve our fleet?

As this plan makes clear, the nature of lifesaving is changing, at a time when demand for our vital service is increasing.

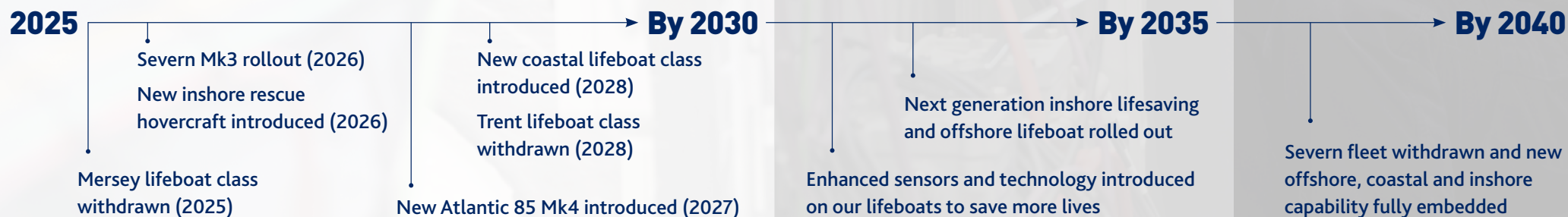
So we must ensure that we have the appropriate lifeboats in the right places, which will save the greatest number of lives in the most effective way.

In-depth data, insights and specialist knowledge have informed what capabilities are needed from the RNLI's lifeboat fleet and which lifeboats could deliver these capabilities.

This has led to a fleet strategy that will:

- Deliver all-weather cover to inshore lifeboat stations within 60 minutes of launch
- Provide all-weather coverage out to 75 nautical miles from the vast majority of the UK and Ireland coasts
- Provide large-tow capability to known historic risk locations
- Streamline the RNLI's all-weather lifeboat fleet. The Mersey, Trent and Severn class lifeboats will gradually exit from the fleet
- Deliver a new concept of training
- Explore future-proofing the service by reducing crewing demand and allowing digital enhancement of lifesaving through connectivity.

Indicative timeline of key milestones in delivering the fleet strategy



In summary

WHAT IS THE 5-YEAR PLAN?

It shows how we'll invest in new and existing areas of infrastructure, estates, technology and equipment, so we can save more lives in a changing world.

It also shows how we'll better serve our volunteers and frontline lifesavers by simplifying our services, reducing duplication and delivering the best possible value for our donors' money.

HOW WILL THE RNLI FUND THESE PLANS?

Thanks to the continued generosity of our incredible donors and supporters – and the careful decisions made over the last few years – we can respond to changes in society, economics, and technology, to ensure the RNLI is sustainable in the future.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER 2030?

This is the first of three 5-Year Plans designed to ensure we are ready to save more lives at sea in 2040 and beyond. This first plan focuses on investments and our appetite to make tough decisions to ensure we are prioritising the right activity to support our volunteers and frontline lifesavers and better serve our communities.

For more information, scan the QR code or go to **RNLI.org/OneCrewOnePlan**





Thank you

Photos: Cloud Dancer Photography, Stephen Duncombe, EMEDO, Oscar Johnson, Nicholas Leach, Laura Lewis, Andy Lyons, Paul Martin/twonamesphotography, RNLI/(Harrison Bates, David Edwards, Michael Jess, Neil Longdin, Nigel Millard, Nihab Rahman, Nathan Williams), Hannah Scoular, Shutterstock, Whitstable Lifeboat Station/@imagedrum

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

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