

How to talk about ...

A guide to help you talk about the important issues

Using this guide: It's important that we all speak consistently about what the RNLI does and the topics we have been focusing on recently. So, this document is intended to help you respond to questions on current topics from the public or colleagues. The 2021 Loud & Clear booklet will also help you to talk about the RNLI's work. If you receive any direct enquiries from the media, please pass them on to the Media Engagement Team on 01202 336789 or email PressOffice@rnli.org.uk.

Our lifesaving services during the pandemic

We provide a world-class lifesaving service and that mission has not changed during the continued coronavirus pandemic. Despite the challenges presented to us, we are all working hard to deliver the best possible lifesaving effect.

Last year, we adapted quickly to keep our people safe, sourcing and providing our lifesavers with millions of items of medical-grade PPE to protect both them and the public. And, although our afloat exercises were frustrated for much of last year, we created and delivered a range of specialist online courses and webinars for crews to sharpen their skills at home.

As we look ahead, we anticipate this year's summer season to be our busiest yet with even more holidaymakers heading for staycations at coastlines around the UK and Ireland. Throughout this time, the RNLI's priorities continue to be the safety and wellbeing of our volunteers and staff; the effective delivery of our lifesaving service; and ensuring that we have a sustainable plan for the future funding of our activities. We are still dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, so making sure RNLI lifesavers can operate safely with the right PPE, procedures and infrastructure in place remains our priority. We will continue to do all we can to protect the public from both infection and the normal dangers in and around the water.

RNLI finances due to the pandemic

Covid-19 was a wave that no one expected – it saw organisations and businesses across the world adapt to enormous disruption, and government restrictions and guidelines required us to quickly adapt, change our ways of working, and temporarily suspend or postpone many of our planned activities.

The lockdown measures forced the RNLI to temporarily pause the delivery of construction and non-essential maintenance of lifeboats and lifeboat stations and the delivery of training. This resulted in a reduction in our charitable spend of £42.3M for 2020, compared to 2019. The pandemic also significantly impacted our ability to fundraise as we were forced to cancel planned fundraising events and close our shops, which resulted in a £5.3M fall in donations and £1.9M drop in trading income compared to 2019.

As a result of government restrictions, a significant number of roles were also directly impacted and became unable to function under these restrictions. With this in mind, we took the difficult decision to furlough a total of 748 people across the UK and Ireland over the course of 2020. Donations fell by over £5M in 2020, accounting for 24% of our funding, so like many other charities and organisations, furlough presented a vital lifeline for us during this period.

Despite these challenges, our lifesavers kept a 24/7 lifeboat service running throughout, without interruption. As restrictions were briefly eased throughout the summer, more people than ever flocked to beaches across the UK and Ireland, putting unprecedented strain on our services. Nonetheless, our crews and lifeguards saved a total of 349 people over the course of 2020 and in the summer months alone, RNLI lifeboat crews saved 140 lives, a 32% increase on the previous year.

Because of the hard work, resilience and dedication of our people and the incredible generosity of our supporters, we finished the year in what seems a comfortable financial position. Our net income was up slightly by £4.3M, largely due to an increase in legacy income.

And whilst the drop in charitable spending in 2020 may seem like a large figure, much of the paused activity which led to that fall has simply been delayed, not abandoned. We will be making vital investments to our infrastructure across the UK and Ireland, made possible by the unwavering support of our volunteers, staff and supporters.

As Covid-19 restrictions ease this summer, we are committed to catching up on lost time and activities. We have designated £11.4M of our free reserves to ensure that there are funds available to complete the projects and activities that were delayed in 2020, including lifeboat construction and refits, building new lifeboat stations, carrying out improvement works at lifeboats stations, crew training and strategic projects.

We don't know what the longer-term implications of Covid-19 will be on our finances, or society at large. But together, we are ready to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond.

There are some Q&As at the end of this guide to elaborate if you'd like more detail on this particular topic.

Government funding

The RNLI receives very little UK Government support and less than 2% of the RNLI's total funding comes from government sources. Although we do not normally actively seek government support, we changed this stance during the coronavirus pandemic as finances became uncertain. We did draw on staff retention schemes from the UK and Irish governments. This allowed us to claim for staff costs while maintaining people's jobs and avoiding any immediate redundancies or periods of unpaid leave. It also allowed us to use our remaining resources – and supporters' donations – to focus on our lifesaving service.

The RNLI can confirm that it no longer has anybody on furlough. As a charity, 94% of our total income comes from donations and so our lifesaving service relies on the generosity of our supporters.

Equality diversity and inclusion, including links to slavery

For nearly 200 years, we have always rescued anyone in trouble at sea without judgement or preference; knowing that someone is in trouble and needs to be rescued is enough for us to act. Every life matters and is worth saving. This is rooted in our lifesaving history and will never change.

But there are some things in the RNLI's past that we are not proud of. Some individuals linked to the slave trade, as well as abolitionists, helped to establish the early RNLI. We acknowledge this part of our history but, of course, the RNLI today does not support or tolerate slavery in any way. For instance, we are committed to ensuring that modern slavery and human trafficking are not present in any RNLI supply chains. And we do not tolerate any disrespectful behaviour towards each other, supporters, or members of the public.

In the same way that the RNLI saves lives at sea without prejudice, we aspire to be an organisation where our people are valued no matter who they are. We aim to be truly inclusive, benefit from diversity and appreciate everyone for their individual contribution. In our crew, everyone should be able to be themselves and reach their full potential. We want to recruit and retain the best people and aim to be truly representative of all sections of society. We have some way to go, but Chief Executive Mark Dowie is determined to improve the diversity of our people, and make sure that all parts of the RNLI are inclusive and safe places for those who have joined our cause to give something back to their communities, whoever they are and wherever they are from.

Migrant activity

RNLI volunteer crews are tasked by the UK Coastguard and Irish Coast Guard to assist anyone who is in trouble on the water. We are there to make sure they get the help they need. Anyone can drown, but no one should. We have always rescued those in trouble at sea without judgement, no matter who they are or why they need our help. We have been doing this since 1824. This stance is to satisfy our fundamental responsibility towards the safety of people at sea. We respond to distress at sea in these circumstances in the same way as we do for any other search and rescue situation. The RNLI is not expected to be part of the wider immigration or border protection policies of the many jurisdictions that we operate in. That is the responsibility of government. Questions about border controls, immigration and the legality of right to remain are questions for our respective governments, they are not matters for the RNLI.

We are immensely proud of the work of RNLI crews and teams in saving lives at sea without judgment, even in some of the most challenging and difficult circumstances. And our work involving the rescue of migrants is no different.

Our international work

The RNLI has joined forces with Ireland, Bangladesh and organisations across the United Nations (UN) to help secure a global resolution for drowning prevention, with the first official World Drowning Prevention Day making its way on to the UN's annual calendar. A global day of recognition for drowning prevention will now take place annually on **25 July**, creating a moment to commemorate the lives of more than 235,000 people that are lost to drowning across the world each year.

We believe that with others, we should use our lifesaving expertise to try and help tackle this global drowning problem. Our work so far has shown that simple, inexpensive solutions are very effective; a relatively low investment in overseas projects goes a long way and makes a big difference.

Our founder, Sir William Hillary, had the vision that we 'should extend our views [of drowning prevention] from our own immediate coasts, to the most remote quarters of the globe, and to every neighbouring state'. This remains relevant today.

We currently spend less than 2% of the RNLI's total annual expenditure on our international drowning prevention activity and we actively seek donations specifically for this work, including the Isle of Man's International Development Fund and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in the UK.

Q&A

This Q&A covers a range of questions volunteers and staff may like to know more information about in relation to the impact of the first year of the pandemic on the RNLI.

Q: Why has the RNLI experienced a £42.3M underspend in 2020?

A: 2020 was an especially challenging year as the financial effects of the pandemic had to be managed in an ever-changing environment. We changed our ways of working in line with government guidelines. In particular, we had to pause the building and non-essential maintenance of our lifeboats and lifeboat stations, while also delaying a variety of other activities. But this work has only been delayed, not abandoned, and still needs to be completed. We recognise that, while the RNLI has managed the financial impact of coronavirus in the short term, there is still much to do in 2021 and beyond. £11.4M has already been ring-fenced from our free reserves to be used specifically on activities that were paused in 2020, including lifeboat construction and refits, building new lifeboat stations, carrying out improvement works at lifeboats stations, crew training and strategic projects.

Q: If the RNLI had to pause spending in 2020, were critical parts of the service neglected? Has this underspend on boat building and training had a material impact on lifesaving activities?

A: Dedicated RNLI staff, supporters and volunteers continued their important work and maintained a 24/7 lifeboat service running throughout the pandemic. We had lifeguard patrols on 177 beaches, and

despite the challenges posed by Covid-19 and restrictions on ways of working, we covered 71% of the beaches we would normally cover. This is testament to the hard work and dedication of all our lifesavers, and, over the course of 2020, RNLI lifesavers saved 349 people. We adapted quickly to keep our people safe, sourcing and providing our lifesavers with millions of items of medical-grade PPE to protect both them and the public. And, although our afloat exercises were disrupted for much of the year, we created and delivered a range of specialist online courses and webinars for crews to do at home.

Q: As a result of this underspend / surplus, will the RNLI reduce its fundraising activities in 2021?

A: Donations from community fundraising activities account for 24% of our funding and play a vital role in allowing the RNLI to run a 24/7 lifesaving service. The impact of the pandemic led to a £5.3M drop in donations during 2020, but we are looking forward to recommencing our fundraising activity in 2021 to ensure the RNLI has the income it requires to continue to provide its vital lifesaving service.

Q: Given the RNLI's significant reserves, combined with its underspend for 2020, will the RNLI be returning any financial support to government, or providing funding to other charities who have undergone material financial hardship?

A: Like for so many other employers, the government job retention schemes have been incredibly valuable to the RNLI, enabling us to protect vital jobs. We used the schemes as they were intended and we have no remaining staff on furlough. We do not plan to repay the furlough money, which enabled us to maintain our lifesaving service at a critical time.

Q: RNLI ran an extensive fundraising campaign in winter 2020, using the impact of Covid-19 as a key reason for fundraising. Was RNLI aware of a growing surplus at this time? If so, did RNLI mislead the public over its finances?

A: No. Donations from community fundraising activities make up 24% of our fundraising and play a vitally important part in ensuring we can offer a 24/7 lifesaving service. The impact of the pandemic led to a £5.3M drop in donations during 2020.

An additional £11.4M has already been ring-fenced from our free reserves to be used specifically on activities that were paused in 2020, including lifeboat construction and refits, building new lifeboat stations, carrying out improvement works at lifeboats stations, crew training and strategic projects.

Q: As a result of Covid-19, all RNLI staff have received a pay freeze in 2021. Why is this necessary given the charity saw an increase in financial resources of over £20M last year?

A: We had a charitable underspend of over £40M, which was a direct result of activity we were forced to suspend due to Covid-19. Like many organisations, we were forced to make difficult financial decisions during an incredibly challenging and fast-changing environment, to protect jobs in the long-term. All our volunteers and staff have shown incredible resilience in the face of adversity in 2020, and kept a 24/7 lifeboat service running throughout, without interruption.

In recognition of the dedication and sacrifices made by RNLI staff over the last 12 months, all employees have been granted three additional days of annual leave this year.

The pay freeze applied to all RNLI staff, including the Executive Team. In addition, our Chief Executive, Mark Dowie, took a voluntary pay cut of 50% in April 2020 until the end October 2020.

Q: Given that the impact of Covid-19 on the RNLI's finances was less severe than expected, will staff receive a one-off payment or will the pay freeze be removed immediately?

A: There are currently no plans for a one-off payment.