

Kent County Council – A Lifesaving Employer

Proposer: Mr Sole

Seconder: Mr Ricketts

Motion

The County Council resolves to:

1. Recommend that relevant Officers and Members engage formally with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution with the aim of Kent County Council becoming a recognised “Lifesaving Employer”.
2. Direct Officers to work with the RNLI, trade unions and employees to explore and develop a clear and practical framework enabling Council employees who volunteer with the RNLI to:
 - a. respond to emergency call-outs during working hours wherever reasonably practicable;
 - b. attend essential RNLI training and exercises;
 - c. have appropriate arrangements following prolonged or overnight lifesaving operations, recognising the importance of fatigue and employee welfare; and
 - d. have clear and consistent guidance for managers and employees.
3. Ensure that these arrangements appropriately balance the Council’s responsibility to maintain essential public services with its responsibility as an employer to support volunteering and community service.
4. Promote RNLI volunteering among Kent County Council employees and recognise publicly the contribution made by employees who already serve with the RNLI.
5. Call on other major employers across Kent to follow the Council’s example and look to become Lifesaving Employers, helping ensure that RNLI volunteers can answer the call whenever lives are at risk.
6. Request that the relevant Cabinet Member reports back to the appropriate committee within six months on progress towards establishing Kent County Council as a Lifesaving Employer.

Background Information provided by the Liberal Democrat Group:

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) has been saving lives at sea for over 200 years. Its mission is simple: to save lives. RNLI volunteer crews respond to emergencies regardless of who is in the water or why they are there, running

towards danger when others are in peril. In addition to lifeboat crews, every summer, RNLI lifeguards patrol beaches across the UK, including in Kent, helping keep people safe. Highly trained and skilled, lifeguards work hard to ensure everyone can stay safe and have fun at the coast.

This lifesaving work is particularly important in Kent, a county with a proud maritime heritage, a major visitor economy and a significant coastline. The RNLI operates nine lifeboat stations across Kent at Gravesend, Sheerness, Whitstable, Margate, Ramsgate, Dover, Walmer, Littlestone-on-Sea and Dungeness, providing vital search and rescue cover for the county's coastline, the Thames Estuary, the English Channel and surrounding waters. Crews respond to a wide range of incidents involving recreational and commercial vessels, people in the water, those cut off by tides and other maritime emergencies.

The scale and importance of this work is demonstrated by both the frequency of call-outs and the complexity of incidents attended. Between January and August 2025, Whitstable RNLI responded to 36 incidents, including three call-outs in a single weekend. In the same year, Volunteers from Dungeness, Dover, Walmer and Ramsgate were jointly recognised with the Global Search & Rescue Excellence Award for their role in carrying out complex and distressing rescues in the English Channel.

The RNLI's presence is of significant value to Kent's economy as well as public safety. Kent's visitor economy is worth approximately £4.1 billion annually and supported 66 million domestic and international visits in 2024, sustaining more than 82,000 jobs. The county's coastline, beaches, seaside towns and maritime heritage are central to that success. Kent is also home to busy commercial waterways and ports, alongside fishing, leisure boating, sailing and other marine activities, all of which rely on a safe and resilient maritime environment. RNLI crews regularly respond to incidents involving both commercial and recreational users of Kent's waters.

RNLI lifeboat crews are volunteers who balance their commitment to saving lives with employment and family responsibilities. When their pager sounds, volunteers may need to leave work at very short notice to respond to emergencies, while also undertaking regular training and exercises to maintain operational readiness. As an independent charity that receives no government funding for its lifesaving service, the RNLI depends on public generosity and community support. In 2024, the cost of operating its lifesaving service was £190.3 million, with around 90% of income

coming from donations. The organisation also relies on supportive employers who enable volunteers to respond to emergencies and attend essential training. Through its "Lifesaving Employer" scheme, the RNLI recognises employers who play a crucial role in making this lifesaving service possible.

Every life is precious, and when someone is in danger at sea the priority must always be to save life. The courage, commitment and selflessness shown by RNLI volunteers should be matched by the support of the organisations they work for. As one of the largest employers in Kent, Kent County Council should lead by example, demonstrating its commitment to the resilience, safety and wellbeing of Kent's coastal communities, visitors and maritime economy by supporting employees who volunteer with the RNLI. Supporting these volunteers is not simply an employee benefit; it is a recognition of the vital public service they provide and an investment in the safety of those who live, work and visit our coast. Kent should be a county where people who step forward to save lives are supported to do so, and Kent County Council should be proud to support employees who put themselves forward to save lives at sea, whoever needs their help.