



Service Instruction 0003 Operational Learning

Document Control

Description and Purpose

This document provides guidance on the post incident debrief procedure to follow and details the various levels of debrief required subject to the nature and complexity of the incident.

Active date	Next review date	Author	Editor	Publisher
May 2011	September 2026			

Amendment History

Version	Date	Reasons for Change	Amended by
2.0	May 2011	Amended in line with new procedure	
4C	Jan 13	Changes to FDS, PDA, inclusion of Rapid Deployment and Operational Debrief Report	
4D	Jan 14	Annual review	
4E	Jan 15	Annual review, Change to decision control process	
4F	JUL 16	Insert new Decision Making Process	
4G	May 2018	OLP Updated information	
4H	June 18	Add ANNEX F – Op learning instruction	
4I	Mar 2019	Addition of TRiM	
4J	Feb 2020	Cluster ex. removed and OLG added	
20.2	Jan 2021	Inclusion of TRiM in flow charts	
20.3	Dec 2022	NOL Good Practice Guide update	
5.0	Nov 2023	Inclusion of hot debrief requirement in STOP messages, requested by SM Tremain	
6.0.	March 2025	Revised approach and policy title as agreed at SLT (policy changes were effective as of 10 th March 2025)	
7.0	September 2025	Minor amends to TOR for OLB and inclusion of desktop reviews	

Target audience

All CFRS	✓	Ops Crews	CFP	Community Safety
Principal Officers		Senior Managers	Support staff	

Relevant legislation (if any)

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Post Incident Learning: Levels of Debrief.....	4
3. On Scene Debriefing	4
4. Structured Debriefing.....	5
5. Multi-Agency Debriefs.....	6
6. Other Sources of Operational Learning	6
7. Communicatng Risk Critical Information	6

1. Introduction

The Operational Learning Policy is the responsibility of the Area Manager Operational Policy & Assurance (OPA). It applies to all operational and fire staff personnel dependent on their role during an incident.

Ensuring that lessons are learned from previous incidents, so that occurrences can be prevented in the future, is central to the health, safety and welfare of people working for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS). Learning from incidents goes beyond simply identifying what went well or what might have gone wrong. While this information is useful in determining how things should be done, learning has truly been achieved only when some form of change is implemented that ensures actions will be different in the future.

The overall aim of this policy is to inform organisational improvements and improve firefighter safety, both within Cheshire and where appropriate nationally.

To promote best practice in line with national guidance this policy is designed to meet requirements contained within both the Fire Standard for Operational Learning and the National Operational Learning Good Practice Guide.

The Operational Learning Board (OLB) has the responsibility to monitor and review all operational learning identified within the organisation. OLB will co-ordinate changes to improve performance and provide appropriate scrutiny and oversight to ensure the application of this policy. The terms of reference for this meeting are contained within **Appendix A**.

2. Post Incident Learning: Levels of Debrief

The scale and depth of any debrief will be determined by the nature of the incident and will fall into one of the following categories:

Debrief Type	When	By Who
On Scene Debrief	Carried out at scene immediately following incident or if the scene of unsafe or inappropriate (e.g. fatalities are involved), on return to station.	Incident Commander
Structured Debrief	Within 8 weeks of the incident, less if practicable to do so.	OPA or On Call, Command and Assurance Team
Multi-Agency Debrief	Usually facilitated by the Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) following a declared major incident or other complex multi-agency operation.	Cheshire Resilience Forum

3. On Scene Debriefing

CFRS strives to ensure that a 'learning culture' is the norm for staff. On Scene Debriefing is the first tool we can use to identify operational learning.

It offers the opportunity for staff to reflect on an incident they have just attended, identify key outcomes, observations and issues, and can be conducted at any incident deemed necessary by the Incident Commander. On-scene debriefing also allows for personnel to begin to rationalise the incident they have been involved in, and carrying out an on-scene debrief should be an integral part of starting the welfare process.

It is important to help reinforce the reflection of individuals on what happened during the event, particularly to focus on the areas of:

- Tactics employed and their effectiveness in dealing with the incident
- The performance of the team and individuals
- Hazard and risk identification and whether control measures were successful in mitigating these
- Whether there are any organisational factors (e.g. procedures or equipment) which worked well or presented challenges in resolving the incident

The incident commander should make notes of discussion points to submit this information as an On-Scene debrief. Whilst an Incident Commander may elect to complete an On-Scene debrief at any incident where they identify learning, a written submission should be provided using the MS Forms application at any of the following incidents:

- Any Make Pumps 4-7
- Any building fire involving six or more BA wearers
- Any fatal fire
- Any fire where a rescue is performed
- Any RTC where a casualty is physically extricated
- Any water incident where SRT technicians commit to the water

- Any height incident where rope rescue equipment is deployed
- Any hazardous materials incident where BA or GTS wearers are deployed
- Any incident involving other transport systems (air, rail and ships)
- Any confirmed fire in a high-rise property
- Any incident involving Lithium-Ion Battery technology
- Any incident deemed appropriate by the Incident Commander or Tactical Manager in attendance

At the above incident types it must be confirmed within the 'Stop' message to North West Fire Control that an On-Scene debrief has taken place. The incident log will be sampled by OPA on a weekly basis to confirm that a submission has been made for the above incident types.

Appendix B contains a copy of the above list and the questions which are included within the MS Forms return; these should be used to structure On-Scene debrief discussions. A laminated copy of this guidance is available in the Command Packs carried on all fire appliances.

The details submitted via MS Forms resulting from an Ops Debrief will be analysed by the Operational Training and Learning Team to identify any emerging trends or issues which require discussion at the OLB. Whilst it will not always be possible to respond to each submission individually, feedback will be provided to the originator where appropriate.

4. Structured Debriefing

An On Scene debrief will be sufficient for the vast majority of incidents attended by Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service.

More complex incidents will use a structured debrief which will allow individuals and teams to systematically analyse and evaluate the decisions taken and tactics used, with their colleagues and managers. Structured debriefs should be conducted in an open and constructive manner to assess standards against a number of predetermined areas.

These type of debriefs will be organised and facilitated through the Operational Learning Officer and will, as far as practicable, involve those personnel attending or involved in the incident (including North West Fire Control staff). A structured debrief should be conducted as soon as is reasonably practicable afterwards, ideally within four weeks, however it is accepted that due to diary constraints this may extend up to eight weeks after the incident.

Incidents which would generally require a Structured debrief:

- Any Make Pumps 8+
- Any Major Incident declaration
- Any other incidents as specified by the Group Manager – Operational Training & Learning

By the very nature of fire and rescue service operations, there should be flexibility about who needs to attend a structured debrief. Some incidents may warrant only the incident command team being present, while others may need to involve those who have had a historical interaction with a site, premises or person. It may be appropriate to ask partner agencies to attend, although this does not detract from the need to conduct a formal multi-agency debrief for major incidents (see Section 5).

In addition to the areas reviewed in an On-Scene debrief, a structured debrief should also consider:

- A detailed sequence of events (timeline)
- Previous activities at the site (e.g. incidents, protection activity)
- The actions of Fire Control
- Post incident actions

It may be advisable for the structured debrief to be facilitated by an individual who was not involved in the original incident. Following the debrief, the facilitator will present the debrief outcomes to the OLB, who will agree any formal recommendation for action.

Where an incident meets the criteria for a structured debrief, however the nature of the incident is such that it is considered a full structured debrief would not add value in terms of learning (e.g. a large make up or PDA which was rapidly de-escalated), a desktop review of the incident may instead be completed if agreed by the Head of Operational Policy and Assurance. This allows information to be gathered from the On-Scene debrief submission and discussions with the relevant commanders who attended to formulate a debrief report without gathering all attendees together.

5. Multi-Agency Debriefs

When an incident is declared a major incident a multi-agency debrief will usually be instigated by the Cheshire Resilience Forum. The CFRS structured debrief should ideally be completed prior to the Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) debrief allowing learning identified through this process to be shared with partner agencies.

The required attendance by suitable officers and staff will be identified by the Station Manager - Resilience who will ensure they are invited to feedback into this process.

6. Other Sources of Operational Learning

If a Flexi Duty Shift Officer (FDS) is not assuming command they should act as a coach/mentor to the Incident Commander through the course of the incident. Part of this function is to support the identification of operational learning to promote the completion and submission of an 'On Scene Debrief' on return to station by the Incident Commander. To support the operational learning process FDS Officer should complete a Level 1 (CM/WM) or Level 2 (SM) audit and submit this into the On Call, Command and Assurance Team for review and identification of any recurring trends. This is also identified in 'Pillar 5 of the Workplace Assessment strategy.' (E-DOCS-43-2969).

In addition to the these incident ground audits, the OLB will also review information from the following areas to consider if any internal action is required:

- National and Joint Operational Learning submissions
- Outcomes and recommendations from national inquiries and/or reviews of significant incidents
- Coronal Regulation 28 recommendations
- Outcomes identified in the Station Performance and Operational Assurance (SPOA) audit programme
- Outcomes identified through the Joint Health, Safety and Welfare Committee (e.g. accident investigations)

7. Communicatng Risk Critical Information

Where risk critical information is identified through internal (On-Scene or Structured Debriefs) or through external sources, a communication through PDR Pro will be issued and will require a manual sign off (usually in the form of an Ops Info Note or Safety Flash).

The PDRPro communication will be issued by the the Policy and Planning Team in electronic format on a role specific basis, to ensure that risk critical information is communicated in a consistent and timely manner.



Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service

APPENDIX A - Operational Learning Board (OLB) – Terms of Reference

Purpose:

The purpose of the OLB is to provide an effective governance structure to manage the Service's operational learning process to demonstrate continuous improvement in our operational capabilities. It will consider both internal learning and that which is identified from a broad range of external sources. The board will ensure that all learning is effectively identified, assessed and that resulting actions and organisational change is clearly determined and tracked to completion.

Membership:

- Area Manager – Head of Operational Policy & Assurance (Chair)
- Area Manager – Head of Service Delivery
- Group Manager – Operational Training & Learning
- Station Manager B – Operational Training & Learning
- Group Manager – Policy and Planning
- Station Manager B – Operational Support
- Station Manager B – Policy and Planning
- Station Manager B – Resilience
- Station Manager A – National Inquiries
- Watch Manager – Operational Learning Officer
- Group Manager – On Call Management and Command
- Group Manager – Service Delivery Manager (with SPOA reference)
- Cheshire Resilience Forum Business Manager
- Health and Safety Advisor

Frequency:

The meetings will be held every other month or more frequently as required.

Meeting Format:

Meetings will be held in person. Should a member of the standard attendee list not be able to attend a deputy should be nominated. Agreed actions will be logged on the Operational Learning Dashboard in MS Planner.

Governance:

The Area Manager Head of Operational Policy & Assurance will chair the meeting and report progress to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer as required.

Standard Agenda – Part 1 (Debriefs)

1. Thematic Summary of 'On Scene' Debriefs

To be prepared by: Group Manager – Operational Training and Learning

Provide a summary of the total number of On Scene debriefs which have been completed.
Provide a thematic summary identifying any areas of concern which are the subject of repeated debriefs or significant issues which have been raised.
The MS Forms dashboard will also be presented.

Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

2. CFRS Structured Debriefs Completed

To be prepared by: Group Manager – Operational Training and Learning

Provide an overview of structured debriefs and recommendations which have been identified. Chair to assess the practicability of the recommendations and agree recommendations to be added to the OLB action log.

3. CRF Update - Multi-Agency Debriefs and Interoperability Board

To be prepared by: CRF Business Manager / Station Manager – Resilience

Provide an overview of any outcomes or learning for CFRS which has been identified in both multi-agency debriefs or at Interoperability Board meetings. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

Standard Agenda – Part 2 (Other Learning)

1. Thematic Summary of Level 1 and 2 Incident Audits

To be prepared by: Group Manager – On Call, Command and Assurance

Performance information detailing of the number of Level 1 and 2 debriefs which have been completed.

Provide a thematic summary identifying any areas of concern which are the subject of repeated audits or significant issues which have been raised.

Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

2. National Operational Learning (NFFC)

To be prepared by: Station Manager – Operational Training and Learning

Provide an overview of NOL/OIs issued since the last meeting and confirm actions taken in response to these. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

3. Joint Operational Learning (JESIP)

Provide an overview of JOLs and JOL action notes issued since the last meeting and confirm actions taken in response to these. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

4. National Inquiries/Incident Reports – Review of Recommendations

To be prepared by: Group Manager – Operational Training and Learning / Station Manager – National Inquiries

Review progress against all of the recommendations and associated tasks which have been determined following national inquiries and incidents of note which have been reviewed (e.g. Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Kerslake Inquiry).

5. Coronal Regulation 28 Recommendations

To be prepared by: Group Manager – Operational Training and Learning

Provide an overview of any Reg 28 recommendations from the NFCC tracker which have operational implications and require improvements or changes to operational training or policy. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

6. Thematic Summary of Station Performance and Operational Assurance (SPOA) Audits (by exception, usually annually although interim reports may be presented)

To be prepared by: Service Delivery Manager (with SPOA reference)

Provide an overview of any emerging themes resulting from the operational assurance section of the SPOA audits. This will be presented by exception only, usually at the end of each annual cycle unless urgent issues become apparent in the intervening period. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

7. Outcomes from Accident Investigations / Joint Health, Safety & Welfare Committee (by exception)

To be prepared by: Group Manager – Policy and Planning

Provide an overview of any actions resulting from JHSWC which are operational in nature and require improvements or changes to operational training or policy. Chair to agree actions and tasks to be added to the OLB action log.

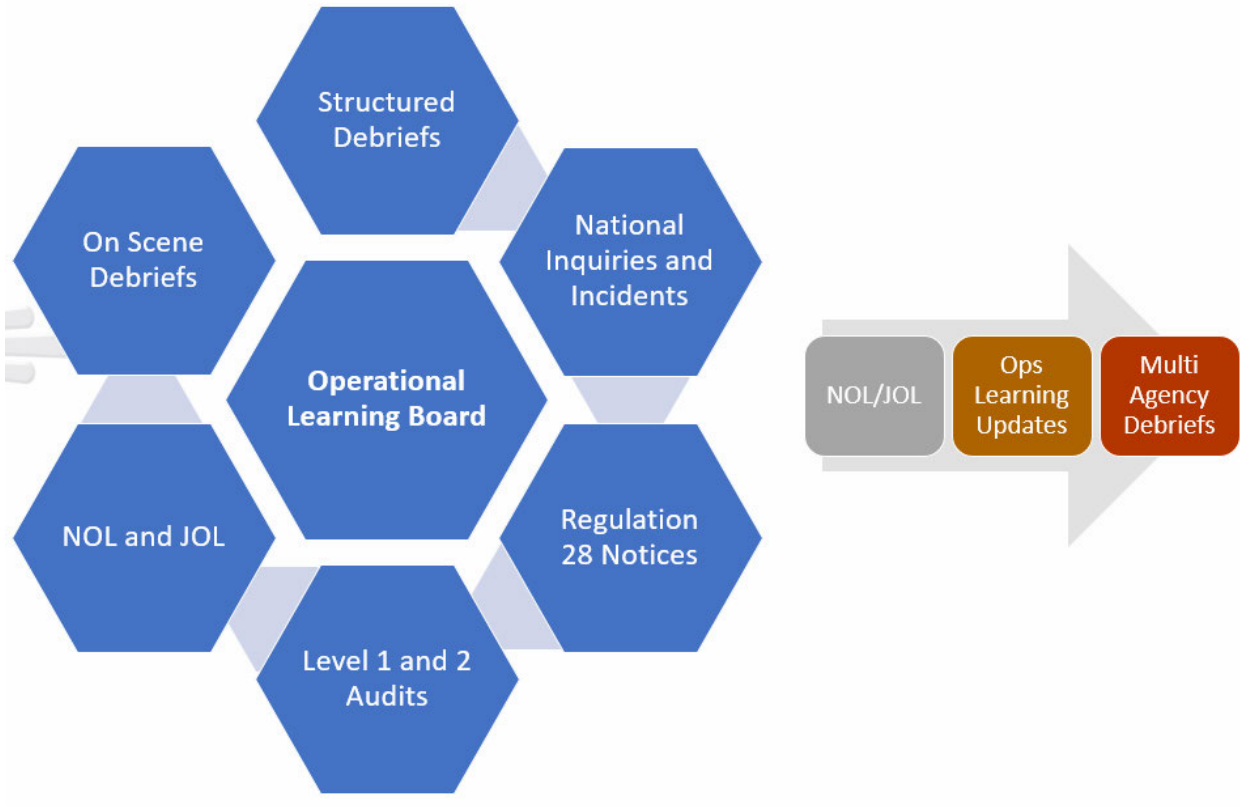
Standard Agenda – PART 3 (by exception and only annually prior to each training cycle)

1. Review Operational Training Strategy

Review contents of refresher courses for the next year and ensure that where appropriate the content reflects learning and outcomes identified through the ops learning process.

2. Review Command Training Strategy

Review contents of the next L2-L4 refresher courses and ensure that where appropriate the content reflects learning and outcomes identified through the ops learning process.





ON-SCENE DEBRIEF

Incidents which require an On-Scene debrief to be submitted:

- Any Make Pumps 4-7
- Any building fire involving six or more BA wearers
- Any fatal fire
- Any fire where a rescue is performed
- Any RTC where a casualty is extricated
- Any water incident where SRT technicians commit to the water
- Any height incident where rope rescue equipment is deployed
- Any hazardous materials incident where BA or GTS wearers are deployed
- Any incident involving other transport systems (air, rail and ships)
- Any confirmed fire in a high-rise property
- Any incident involving Lithium-Ion Battery technology
- Any other incident deemed appropriate by the Incident Commander or Tactical Manager in attendance



ON-SCENE DEBRIEF

MS Forms Questions for completion:

When completing the On-Scene Debrief MS Form, you will be asked for the following information:

User – (Auto filled)

Fire Station

Incident Number

Type of Incident (Fire, RTC, Hazmat, Height Incident, Water Incident, Other Transport, High Rise, Lithium-Ion)

Were any specific issues encountered at the incident and if so, did they involve any of the following?

- Operational Procedures
- Equipment
- Inter-Agency Working
- Communications
- North West Fire Control
- Other – (free text box to expand on anything that does not relate to the above categories)
- No specific issues identified

What went well at the incident?

What could have been improved at the incident?