



Home Office

Operational briefings and planning

Version 7.0

This guidance tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about operational briefings.

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About this guidance

This guidance tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about operational briefings.

It tells you when and why you must give an operational briefing and what to include in the briefing.

It is aligned with instructions in the Immigration Enforcement guidance on:

- Enforcement visits
- planning assessments
- safety and personal protection

This guidance gives information on:

- what an operational briefing is
- when and why you must give an operational briefing
- the format you must present the briefing in
- what you must include in the briefing
- the checks you must undertake prior to any operational visit
- communicating risks to others
- the records you must keep
- security matters
- debriefs

For more information, see:

- Enforcement visits
- Enforcement planning assessments
- Enforcement visits: Safety and personal protection guidance
- National Risk Assessments (NRAs) and corresponding Safe systems of work
- Compliance Framework Principles
- Operational Order Template

The Home Office has a duty to safeguard vulnerable people and promote the welfare of children for more information see: Vulnerable adults and children.

Criminal Investigators in Immigration Enforcement must be aware of their obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Part 3 of the Data Protection Act 2018 see: Data protection.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email the CFI Operational Guidance Risk and Compliance team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **7.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **11 September 2026**

Changes from last version of this guidance

Changes to this version include:

- inclusion of differing authority levels for operational deployments, based on risk assessment
- updated mandatory and suggested pre-deployment checks
- updated references and links to latest IE National Generic Risk Assessments, Safe Systems of Work, and IE operational procedure guidance
- new section on debriefs, in line with IE and College of Policing guidance
- housekeeping

Related content

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Operational briefings

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about what an operational briefing is, when you must hold one and why you must give them.

Definition of a briefing

A briefing is a meeting of the relevant personnel before an operational deployment takes place.

At this briefing, individuals are given tasks and any necessary information to enable them to carry out those tasks safely. The term 'operational deployment' covers a wide range of activities, including Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigations team visits, Immigration Compliance and Enforcement team visits, premises searches, inland drugs or cash interdictions (disruption), and surveillance.

These briefings are delivered by various teams involved in operational work, such as criminal investigation teams (both inland and border crime teams), arrest teams, non-arrest trained teams working with police, surveillance teams, and any other enforcement teams conducting operational deployments.

How you refer to the deployment depends on where you work. The deployment may also be referred to as the 'operation' by crime teams or 'visit' by enforcement teams.

The written document you prepare and base the briefing on is called an operational order. Once you have completed it, you must use the protective marking 'Official - sensitive' and ensure it is handled appropriately.

It is best practice to ask the officer authorising the deployment to check your operational order to make sure you have covered everything. This may not always be possible, however, depending on the circumstances.

Remember, if you are the case officer or officer in charge (OIC), you will probably research and prepare the briefing. If you are the supervising officer, you are responsible for the operation overall, including the briefing.

When briefings must be given

You **must** give a briefing to your team before any operational deployment takes place.

There may be times, however, when you are unable to prepare a written briefing document or hold a full briefing, for example on a reactive deployment taking place at short notice. In these circumstances you must still give a verbal briefing, and record details as soon as you can, in your personal notebook.

For more information, see: Notebooks, day books and decisions logs

Why you must give an operational briefing

Preparing a written operational order is part of the planning you must do before any proactive deployment (operation) takes place. It helps you to:

- check you have covered everything in your planning
- confirm the proposed deployment is the best course of action
- identify alternative courses of action
- identify any risks associated with the deployment

You must conduct an operational briefing because it allows you to tell your team about:

- why you are conducting the deployment
- how it will run
- the roles and responsibilities
- the command structure
- the legal basis for the deployment
- what you hope to achieve
- how you will run the deployment as safely as possible

The operational order is a critical document that will be closely scrutinised if any issues arise during a deployment. It is essential that you complete it thoroughly and accurately. This order serves as your formal record of the instructions you have given your team, including:

- how they must act
- any risks or issues they need to be aware of

Planning a briefing

If you are the officer in charge or the case officer, how you plan the briefing will depend on many things. You must try to identify everything relevant. Some examples of what you could consider are:

Factor	What to consider
Who is going to give the briefing	It is normally your responsibility to prepare and conduct the briefing, but you may decide that parts of the briefing are given by someone else. For example, you may: • ask the silver commander to make an introduction • ask individual team leaders to give the briefing for their particular deployment when you are conducting a large operation with several teams

Factor	What to consider
	- ask an expert who is better qualified to give part of the briefing - be working with teams who wish to give their own briefing, for example: - a police unit for part of the deployment - In exceptional circumstances, a firearms unit
Who to invite	You must invite: - all officers taking part in the deployment - any other experts you may need on the deployment, for example social workers There are many other people you may choose to invite, for example: - interpreters who will be assisting - observers - members of the media, if authorised
The operational order	You must think about: - how many copies you will need - how you will account for each copy (as they all have to be returned at the end of the briefing), for example you can: - number copies - use a sheet to sign them out and back in - when you are going to hand them out, for example: - at the start of the briefing - at the end of the briefing - by email before the briefing itself - clearly marking all parts of the operational order officers must not remove or take on the deployment You may decide it is best not to hand them out at the start of the briefing so everyone will concentrate fully on what you are saying.

Factor	What to consider
	If you send the operational order by email you must: • bear in mind you will have no control over officers printing copies • make it clear in the email the document is marked 'OFFICIAL SENSITIVE'
Time	When deciding what time to hold your briefing, consider: • whether the briefing needs to take place immediately before the deployment: • this is best practice because the information will be fresh in everyone's minds, but it is not mandatory • you want to maximise the time available for the deployment itself • likely traffic delays during any travel period • the time you hold your briefing may be affected by working time regulations For more information, see: Working Time Regulations policy
Location	Briefings are usually conducted in a Home Office building or police station, but they can take place in any secure area, for example, a vehicle. If for any reason you conduct a briefing anywhere else you must make sure you cannot be overheard, and the area is secure. Briefings can also be conducted remotely via secure network such as MS Teams. Other things to consider are: • the size of venue you will need • car parking • using a seating plan

Factor	What to consider
	• whether attendees will need to be issued with a pass to get in • how far those attending will have to travel • the need for overnight accommodation • directions and maps • if there are any costs involved
Presentation aids	How you conduct the briefing will depend on how many people you have attending. You may find it useful to use: • flip charts • white boards • overhead projectors power point presentations • photographs • video • maps • street plans • diagrams • anything else to help you explain the briefing more clearly

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The IIMARCH briefing format

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office what format you must give the operational briefing in and what you must include in it.

The Home Office currently uses the same briefing format as the police; it is known as IIMARCH. The IIMARCH format is recognised as [Authorised Professional Practice](#) by the College of Policing. You must follow this format, in this order, for all briefings you give.

IIMARCH stands for:

- I – [information](#)
- I – [intention](#)
- M – [method](#)
- A – [administration](#)
- R – [risk](#)
- C – [communication](#)
- H – [human rights](#)

Most police forces now add on 'E' and 'R' at the end which stands for 'evaluate' and 'review'. Although the Home Office does not use this at present you need to know about it in case you attend a police briefing. These sections cover a general evaluation and review of the operation.

It is important you give the briefing in this order because it gives structure and clarity, is easier to understand, and is a uniform format all law enforcement agencies are familiar with.

You must prepare a separate briefing document, known as an 'operational order', for each operational visit you conduct.

Criminal and Financial Investigation Operational Guidance Risk and Compliance (CFI OGRC) have produced an Operational Order Template containing the necessary headings and structure required by an IIMARCH briefing.

This template may be adapted by teams as necessary to meet the needs of specific deployments, but it is the responsibility of the officer conducting each briefing to ensure that all the IIMARCH elements outlined in this guidance are properly addressed in the briefing document.

If you are working with an IE Volume Crime Team or participating in operations led by Immigration Compliance and Enforcement, you may use the PRONTO system to record and conduct your briefing, since that system is fully compliant with briefing requirements.

The guidance in the following sections tell you about the sorts of information you should include in each section of the briefing document.

Information

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Intention

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Method

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Administration

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Risk assessment

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Communication

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Human rights

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Assessing and communicating risks: responsibilities

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about the risks associated with an operational deployment, and the duties and responsibilities of officers to assess and communicate them.

Every officer

If you are involved in an operational deployment, regardless of your role, you must conduct dynamic risk (ongoing) assessments as the activity is taking place and warn the officer in charge and colleagues about any risks you identify.

Officer in charge (OIC) or case officer

It is your responsibility when planning and conducting an operational deployment or briefing to:

- identify all possible checks you can make
- make those checks
- get the results
- identify and assess any known or potential risk according to [Red, amber and green ratings](#)
- find ways to reduce the risks if possible
- warn every person going on the visit about the risks
- remind officers of their responsibilities around vulnerability and to notify the OIC or case officer should they identify any vulnerable persons at any stage throughout the operation

Red, amber and green ratings

As outlined in Enforcement planning assessments, the overall risk for any proposed deployment must be assessed by the OIC using a rating of **green**, **amber**, or **red**.

‘Green’ risk refers to a deployment where no risks have been identified beyond those addressed in the relevant National Generic Risk Assessments. Green deployments must be authorised by a Chief Immigration Officer or higher.

‘Amber’ risk refers to deployments where there are identifiable risks that require specific mitigations beyond those in the National Generic Risk Assessments. Amber deployments must be authorised by a HM Inspector or higher.

‘Red’ risk refers to deployments that present significant risks that cannot be mitigated to a lower level. Red deployments must have a dedicated Equality and Community Impact Assessment completed and must be authorised by a Grade 7 officer or higher.

Examples of some significant risks that may present themselves include the following:

- risk to life and limb – beyond those risks contained in general instructions and risk assessments, for example where illegal firearms or edged weapons are believed to be present, or industrial hazards
- risk of damaging community confidence or cohesion
- high potential reputational and / or political risk

A deployment identified and assessed as ‘red’ risk level may still be authorised and implemented where there is a business imperative that outweighs other factors, but a significant risk to officer or public safety that cannot be satisfactorily mitigated and managed is never acceptable.

Supervising officer

It is your responsibility to:

- make sure the officer in charge or case officer has made the mandatory checks
- ensure the officer in charge has requested an equality and community impact assessment (see Enforcement planning assessments)
- satisfy yourself the activity can be conducted safely before you authorise it to go ahead
- make a record of your decision and the reasons for it
- make sure all officers on the deployment have been told about any risks

Asking another team to conduct a deployment on your behalf

In some instances, you may need to ask a team in another area to conduct operational activity on your behalf. For example, after an arrest you may wish to search an address that is not in your area.

If this happens you, as the officer in charge, and your supervising officer must:

- liaise with the officer in charge from the assisting team
- make them aware of all risks already identified
- tell them to conduct checks with:
 - their local intelligence unit
 - local police
- obtain authority from their supervisor and local police control room if required
- make a record of what you have done

If you are asked to assist another team

If you are asked to conduct an operational deployment on behalf of another team you and your supervising officer must:

- ask for all available information from the officer making the request, which must include any risks already identified
- make your own checks with your local intelligence unit and local police
- obtain any authority required from:
 - your supervisor
 - the local police control room
- give your own briefing to your team
- make a record of the request:
 - what you have been told
 - what you have done in response

For more information on risk and risk assessments, see: IE National Risk Assessments

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Conducting a briefing

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office how to conduct an operational briefing.

The operational briefing is normally given by the officer in charge or case officer shortly before the deployment is due to start.

The gold and silver commander will not always be able to attend the briefing. If they do not you must make sure you have given them a copy of the operational order in advance.

If you have decided to give out copies of the briefing, you must have an audit trail, and ensure they are all returned to you at the end of the briefing

If you decide an officer needs to keep a briefing document for any reason, for example:

- bronze commanders (if you are conducting multiple deployments)
- if a deployment takes place at short notice

You must tell them they must:

- store it securely at all times
- not to take it onto the premises being visited unless there is no other option
- return it to you, normally at the debriefing

When you conduct a briefing, you must:

- make sure everybody involved is present:
 - if anyone cannot be present, make other arrangements to brief them
- make any necessary introductions, for example you may be working with:
 - other departments
 - outside agencies
- not use jargon as it may lead to confusion and misunderstanding, especially if you have people from outside your department attending
- tell officers they do not have to make notes during the briefing in their personal notebooks if they don't want to, as the information will be available at the end
- tell officers when they can ask questions, either:
 - at the end of each section
 - at the end of the briefing
- tell officers when they will get a copy of the operational order (if you have decided not to hand this out at the start)
- allow time at the end for asking extra questions
- allow time for officers to look through the operational order if you hand it out
- satisfy yourself before you proceed with the deployment that everybody has understood their role

- satisfy yourself everybody has understood the risk assessment:
 - it is best practice to ask them to read it and confirm they have understood it by signing it although this may not always be possible for larger deployments
- make sure all copies of the operational order have been returned
- tell officers what things from the briefing pack they may take with them
- close the briefing by confirming:
 - the objective of the deployment
 - that there are no more questions

It is good practice to ask officers attending the briefing to sign your hard copy of the operational order to confirm they have attended and understood. If this is not practical you can consider asking team leaders to sign the operational order instead.

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Security and handling operational orders

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about securing and disposing of operational orders, what to do if an operational order is lost, and using an operational order as evidence in a prosecution.

Operational orders must be marked with the security classification 'Official – Sensitive'.

Security during the deployment

It is best practice never to take a copy of the operational order into the premises where the deployment is taking place. Ideally you should leave the operational order stored securely in your office. If this is not possible and you take the operational order with you, it is your responsibility to keep it secure at all times.

If you do leave a copy of the operational order at the premises you could:

- compromise your investigation
- reveal details that could lead to identifying and endangering a source
- reveal operational practices
- face disciplinary action as a result

Record of investigation

You must note on the Clue notes register relating to your investigation details of:

- the checks you have done when preparing the briefing
- the authorities you have obtained
- the briefing you have conducted
- details of any issues raised
- how you dealt with the issues

Responsibilities under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996

You must keep the copy of the operational order used to give the briefing as relevant material under the [Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act \(CPIA\) 1996](#).

An electronic copy of the completed operational order must be classified as 'sensitive' for disclosure purposes, as it contains details of operational practices that are not to be made public for security reasons, because they could compromise future enforcement activity.

The completed operational order must be scheduled and stored appropriately. It should be uploaded to the material register on the Clue system.

The operational order must be retained for the appropriate timeframe in line with CFI Retention policy.

Disposal

You must dispose of all spare copies of the operational order you do not need using available confidential waste facilities.

What to do if you lose an operational order

If you lose a copy of the operational order you must tell your supervising officer immediately because this could compromise the intelligence or its source, or the privacy of any identifiable individual.

The loss may constitute a data breach, which must be reported via Report a data breach or incident.

For this reason, it's advisable to use a reliable method of recording when distributing briefing documents. This ensures there is a clear record of what was shared, which can be referred to if questions or issues arise later.

For more information see:

- [Conducting a briefing](#)
- Managing information securely
- [Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 \(CPIA\)](#)

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Debriefs

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about why and when they should conduct debriefs following operational activity.

Debriefs are an important element of the national briefing model promoted by the [College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice](#).

A debrief must be conducted after an operational visit. The purpose of the debrief is to assess how the deployment went, highlight areas of good practice, and record any lessons learned.

A debriefing should usually be led and conducted by:

- the OIC, where there has been no critical incident or need for investigation following use of force
- His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) where there are concerns around use of force that has been applied
- an IE Post-Incident Manager in co-ordination with the local Gold Commander, where a critical incident has occurred
- an IE Post-Incident Manager, where an incident involving death or serious injury has occurred, and IE Post-Incident procedures have been deployed.
 - in this event, terms of reference may be agreed with an independent investigating authority such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct

For more information on the process following a critical incident see: Critical incident management.

Note that the debrief and any notes or actions occurring as a result of a debrief are disclosable. A record of the debrief including, time, location and officers present must be updated on the event register on Clue. Any notes from the debrief must be uploaded to Clue and linked to the operational visit.

For more information on how to conduct an effective debriefing, see:

- IE post enforcement visit actions
- [Briefing and debriefing | College of Policing](#)

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