

Towards a minimum policing standard

A project exploring the public's understanding of the core functions of police.

Key details

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Police region	Yorkshire
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	May 2022
Date due for completion	April 2027

Research context

When they are asked about policing priorities, what people believe the police should focus on appears to tally with priorities set by the police, such as tackling sexual offending and serious violence. But the way people judge the police is often based on responses to other types of crime, low-level disorder and other calls for service. At the same time, police are increasingly expected to deal with events and issues which are not crimes, raising questions as to what the police should be responsible for, where the boundaries of policing lie and what kind of service should we expect the police to deliver.

With stretched public resources and increased demands on the police to respond to minor public disorder, homelessness and people in mental distress, these questions must be urgently addressed. They relate not only to duty and efficiency but also to issues of public confidence and police legitimacy.

Inspired by research exploring minimum income standards, this study aims to develop the conceptual understanding of a minimum policing standard, highlighting core policing activities, those that are desirable but not essential, and those thought to be inappropriate for policing.

It also explores ethical, political and practical questions about ways to bring about radical change in policing and the extent to which it is appropriate for the public to have a say.

Research methodology

The research initially involved three rounds of focus groups comprising four types of population groups representing a big city, town, rural area and those who have had frequent police contact.

- round one – explored the kinds of things that the police do locally, inviting reflections on what police should do more of, less of, or not do at all, this enabled the researchers to arrive at a definition of policing and its functions
- round two – developed a list of core police activities reflecting people's views about whether or not police should respond to disorder that does not constitute crime, such as mental health crises, homeless people in need and missing persons
- round three – sought to validate the round two findings by presenting them for discussion by other group members who will test and interrogate the ideas

Following this, polling company Verian conducted a population representative survey of England, Wales and Scotland in November/December 2023, which fielded questions developed from our work on developing the Minimum Policing Standard.

These covered the three domains of response, behaviour and treatment, and presence and engagement. Alongside the minimum policing standard items we fielded a range of other questions, covering public attitudes towards police and contact with officers, views on the limits and boundaries of policing and when behaviours or issues warrant or require police intervention.

This work is being followed up with focus groups of front-line officers that will go through a similar 'standards-setting' exercise. We will also conduct a second national survey to replicate and extend the 2023 survey.

Interim reports or publications

'What do the public want from police? Towards a Minimum Policing Standard'. Available at <https://vulnerabilitypolicing.org.uk/what-do-the-public-want-from-police-towards-a-minimum-policing-standard/>

'Do people think police are meeting minimum standards of service delivery?'. Available at: <https://vulnerabilitypolicing.org.uk/do-people-think-police-are-meeting-minimum-standards-of-service-delivery/>

Bradford B and others. (2025). '[What service should police provide? Towards a minimum policing standard](#)'. Policing and Society, pp 883–900.

Bradford B and others. (2025). '[Public confidence in the police: using opinion survey data to explore the current "moment" in British policing](#)'. Policing and Society, pp 1–18.

Additional resources

[Project website](#)