Policing housing precarity and homelessness (PHRASE)

The Policing Housing Precarity and Homelessness (PHRASE) project explores the complicated relationships between policing and homelessness.

Key details

Lead institution	Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre
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Police region	Yorkshire
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	May 2024
Date due for completion	April 2026

Research context

In existing research, homelessness has often been narrowly defined as rough sleeping. This overlooks the experiences of women (including women with children who survive domestic abuse), young people, LGBTQI+ individuals and hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing. These groups are less likely to sleep rough or access homelessness services, meaning their challenges and interactions with policing are not often researched.

Previous studies have also focused on policing homelessness as enforcement, for example managing survival activities or addiction-related issues among individuals experiencing long-term or repeated homelessness. This narrow lens often portrays policing as a tool to regulate or remove

people sleeping rough and living in encampments, rather than addressing the broader realities of homelessness.

This project seeks to go beyond these limitations, exploring the full spectrum of homelessness experiences and how they intersect with policing. By examining the roles of support, referral and collaboration with other services, the project team aims to provide a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the relationship between policing, homelessness and housing precarity.

This project comes at a difficult time for local authorities. In England, local authorities have faced deep and sustained cuts in grant funding since 2010. Homelessness services in England fell from offering 38,534 spaces in 1,271 services in 2014, to offering 33,093 spaces in 911 services in 2022 – a fall of 16%. Also, spending on temporary accommodation that is required under the terms of the homelessness legislation has also seen massive expansion in England. It has risen from a very high £1.6bn in 2010 to £2.29bn in 2024 and threatens multiple local authorities with potential insolvency.

Research methodology

The study will use a mixed-methods approach with a strong emphasis on co-production.

Phase one (2024)

This will involve:

- a desk-based review of the relationships between homelessness, vulnerability, crime and victimisation and policing vulnerability within a variety of homeless accommodation models
- establishing an advisory panel and co-production model that includes people with lived experience
- establishing a data sharing protocol with police forces and relevant homeless services

Phase two (December 2024 to May 2026)

This will involve:

- an ethnographic observation of police interactions with staff and residents across four or five homeless accommodation sites
- observing key meetings at sites with permission from service providers

- conducting 15–20 key informant interviews with important service providers and police officers, with varying levels of seniority
- reviewing diaries kept by service providers that record all police interactions over four months
- conducting 25–30 interviews with service users residing at sites, using creative methods including photo elicitation (using photos to help people explain their feelings and thoughts) and diary-keeping (asking participants to record their daily experiences, thoughts, or activities related to policing homelessness)
- analysing place-based police data on call outs to and interactions with sites
- co-analysing workshops with service users and service providers

Phase three (May to July 2026)

This will involve:

- developing and disseminating best practice recommendations and models in consultation with partners
- exploring opportunities for more creative dissemination work such as exhibiting images

Additional resources

[Project website](#)