

The GRACE Framework



A Governance & Accountability Green Paper Executive Summary

Resettlement, Asylum, Capacity & Equity

Independent discussion document — not government policy
Prepared as a basis for discussion and potential consultation

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Within this framework, the terms GRACE and HOLLY are used as conceptual anchors reflecting two distinct but complementary principles.

GRACE is grounded in its classical sense, derived from the idea of *charis* — a relationship defined by obligation, conduct, and recognised standing. In this context, it reflects a bond formed through the responsible exercise of authority and the trust placed in institutions.

This can be understood as analogous to the relationship between the public and the state: authority is exercised, and in return it must be justified through conduct, accountability, and transparency.

HOLLY draws on the symbolism of the evergreen holly — a plant that endures through winter, representing resilience, protection, and life continuing through hardship.

Historically, holly was placed at entrances as a protective barrier, intended to guard against harm and provide a line of defence around the home.

In this framework, HOLLY reflects a safeguarding standard designed to remain firm under pressure, ensuring that protection is maintained even in the most challenging conditions.

Together, they define the relationship between governance and protection within the framework: the manner in which authority is exercised, and the standard to which protection must be held.

1. Purpose and Position

This Green Paper sets out the GRACE Framework: a governance architecture for asylum, migration, and associated safeguarding systems. It does not prescribe a single political pathway. Instead, it applies established UK traditions of auditability, fiscal discipline, institutional accountability, and public-risk transparency to areas where operational strain, cumulative exposure, and democratic consent increasingly intersect.

The central premise is that secure borders, humanitarian protection, fiscal responsibility, and democratic legitimacy are not competing values. Where governance is robust, they reinforce one another. Where governance is weak, they fail together. GRACE seeks to restore alignment through systems that make capacity, risk, cost, and accountability visible before failure accumulates.

In addition to orienting policy readers, this Executive Summary is intended to provide a stable public reference point for discussion of the framework. By setting out the architecture, scope, and constraints in clear terms, it aims to support accurate public understanding and reduce interpretive ambiguity as the document enters wider debate.

When public debate reaches the point where senior leaders describe aspects of the system as an “experiment,” it signals a deeper governance concern. Democratic societies do not run uncontrolled experiments on their citizens, particularly where the risks, costs, and consequences remain undisclosed. Where outcomes are uncertain, the constitutional response is not rhetoric but structure: risk assessment, transparency, capacity discipline, and democratic consent.

This framework proceeds from that premise. It does not attempt to litigate past decisions, but to document the conditions under which complex systems drift beyond public visibility. By making exposure, thresholds, and correction mechanisms explicit, GRACE seeks to replace implicit experimentation with accountable governance.

2. A Governance Architecture, Not a Policy Lever

Much recent reform debate has focused on individual levers — legislation, enforcement posture, accommodation models, or treaty mechanics. GRACE takes a different approach. It treats migration governance as a whole-of-system governance and accountability challenge requiring durable architecture rather than episodic intervention.

The framework therefore spans legislative design and institutional roles; fiscal control and exposure mapping; safeguarding thresholds and escalation triggers; transparency duties and publication baselines; and independent verification and reconciliation loops. Its aim is not to determine outcomes in advance, but to ensure that whatever outcomes Parliament chooses are capacity-anchored, fiscally explicit, safeguarding-led, and democratically legible.

Nothing in this framework should be read as advocating open borders or uncontrolled entry. On the contrary, GRACE proceeds from the premise that humanitarian protection, border control, and democratic legitimacy are mutually dependent. Systems that lack visible capacity limits or fiscal boundaries ultimately undermine both protection and public trust.

The framework therefore treats control and compassion as structurally linked. Sustainable protection requires clear thresholds, enforceable safeguards, and transparent capacity discipline. Where entry occurs without visible limits, the result is not greater humanity but weaker systems — eroding confidence, displacing costs, and placing vulnerable people at greater long-term risk.

GRACE is designed to prevent that failure mode. It does not prescribe political outcomes, but it insists that any system of entry, protection, or resettlement must operate within declared limits, auditable safeguards, and democratically intelligible constraints.

3. The E–S–V–Z Spine

At the core of the paper is a structural governance spine built around four interlocking annex mechanisms.

Annex E — Risk Register & Thresholds:

Defines common risk taxonomies, trigger points, and automatic escalation conditions, establishing a shared language for identifying when operational variance becomes governance risk.

Annex S — Strategic & Fiscal Control Architecture:

Maps unit costs, forward fiscal envelopes, indemnity exposure, and displacement indicators across the state, making cumulative exposure visible across departmental and local boundaries.

Annex V — Dashboards & Publication Pack:

Sets out a transparency ledger of routinely publishable, non-classified metrics with defined methodologies, enabling democratic scrutiny through repeatable, intelligible data.

Annex Z — Reconciliation & Control Layer:

Converts adverse variance into accountable action — attribution, deadlines, ministerial ownership, and correction pathways — preventing silent drift by requiring reconciliation between policy intent, fiscal reality, and operational impact.

Together, these mechanisms form a continuous governance loop: detection, exposure, publication, and correction.

Figure 1 - The GRACE Governance Spine (E-S-V-Z architecture)

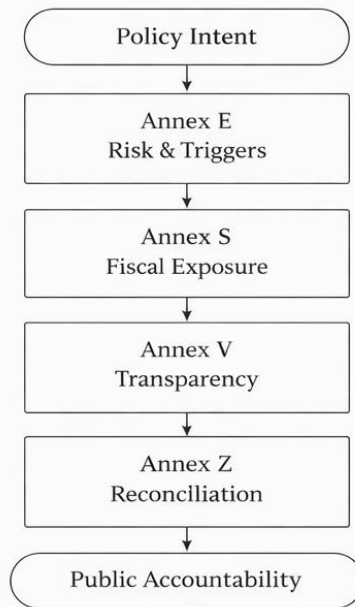


Figure 1 illustrates the structural governance spine at the core of the GRACE framework. The E–S–V–Z architecture provides a continuous accountability loop: risks are defined and thresholded (Annex E), cumulative exposure is mapped and quantified (Annex S), publishable transparency baselines are established (Annex V), and adverse variance is reconciled into attributable corrective action (Annex Z).

This loop is designed to prevent a common failure mode in complex public systems: silent drift. By linking detection, fiscal visibility, publication, and reconciliation into a single architecture, the framework converts abstract accountability into an operational cycle capable of functioning under pressure.

The objective is not to prescribe policy outcomes, but to ensure that exposure, risk, and correction remain structurally visible before failure accumulates.

4. Public Risk and Fiscal Assessment (PRFA)

A core feature of the framework is the introduction of a Public Risk and Fiscal Assessment discipline. PRFA brings cumulative exposure, capacity saturation, and residual risk into a single democratic frame.

Where projected exposure exceeds authorised tolerances, the model triggers structured escalation — including exposure notices, attribution rules, and re-authorisation cycles. This is designed to prevent silent default of risk onto taxpayers or local systems and to restore a clearer relationship between public cost, public risk, and parliamentary consent. PRFA does not prescribe fiscal outcomes; it prescribes fiscal visibility.

5. Auditability and Institutional Accountability

The framework embeds auditability by design. It proposes statutory footing for an Independent Migration & Asylum Auditor with protected resourcing floors and direct reporting duties to Parliament. The objective is to ensure that lawfulness, safeguarding integrity, and fiscal assumptions are subject to independent verification rather than internal reassurance.

Where private or contracted entities perform public functions, GRACE applies functional equivalence: publication, safeguarding, complaints, and transparency duties follow the function, not the provider. Threshold breaches are linked to automatic modulation powers — including pause, inquiry, or corrective sequencing — ensuring that safeguards operate as live controls rather than retrospective lessons.

6. Safeguarding as a System Constraint — The HOLLY Safeguarding Standard (HSS)

Within the GRACE framework, safeguarding is treated not as a downstream welfare function but as a structural constraint on governance. The paper introduces the HOLLY Safeguarding Standard (HSS), a codified operational doctrine designed to ensure that protection of children and other vulnerable people is embedded upstream of policy trade-offs rather than invoked after failure.

HOLLY translates safeguarding from principle into system design. It establishes automatic thresholds, escalation triggers, and publication duties that bind institutions in real time. Where credible indicators of harm arise, safeguarding duties activate as hard controls within the governance architecture, not discretionary considerations.

By integrating safeguarding into risk registers, fiscal exposure mapping, and reconciliation loops, the framework seeks to reduce conditions in which vulnerability can be absorbed quietly or traded against operational expediency. Protection is treated as a governance floor rather than a policy preference, anchoring institutional legitimacy in the ability to protect those most at risk. When bridged with the GRACE framework, the HOLLY Safeguarding Standard (HSS) is designed to embed safeguarding as a structural constraint within the governance architecture.

Figure 2 – Relationship between the GRACE and HOLLY frameworks

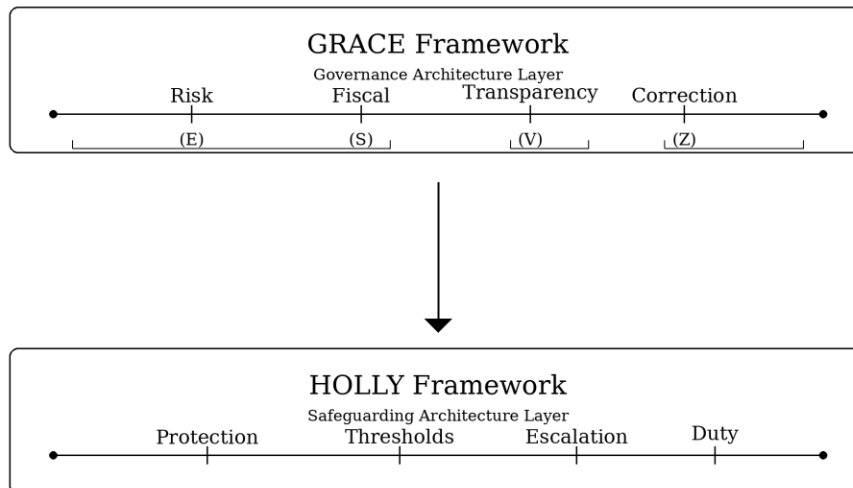


Figure 2 clarifies the relationship between the GRACE governance architecture and the HOLLY safeguarding framework. While closely integrated, the two operate at different structural layers.

GRACE provides the system-wide governance and accountability architecture — risk thresholds, fiscal exposure mapping, transparency baselines, and reconciliation mechanisms. HOLLY operates as a safeguarding doctrine within and alongside that architecture, establishing non-derogable protection duties that constrain governance choices in real time.

This distinction is deliberate. Safeguarding failures in complex systems often arise where safety duties are treated as discretionary or downstream considerations. By positioning HOLLY as a parallel safeguarding architecture rather than a policy subset, the framework aims to ensure that protection remains structurally anchored even where operational pressure is high.

While developed within the GRACE architecture, the HOLLY Safeguarding Standard (HSS) is also designed as a portable safeguarding framework capable of independent application in other institutional or jurisdictional contexts.

In this sense, GRACE governs the system, while HOLLY governs the moral floor of that system.

7. Capacity Discipline and Early Correction

A recurring failure mode in complex systems is delayed recognition of saturation. GRACE therefore emphasises visible baselines and early correction. Capacity ceilings, safeguarding thresholds, and fiscal tolerances are designed to trigger modulation before stress manifests as crisis.

This approach is not predicated on static limits, but on dynamic governance: making pressure visible early, attributing responsibility clearly, and enabling proportionate correction before cumulative exposure becomes structurally embedded.

8. Territorial and Treaty Interfaces

The framework also considers structural contingencies arising in treaty-linked or cross-border governance environments, including Gibraltar and Northern Ireland interfaces. The analysis is preventative rather than accusatory. It seeks to ensure that arrangements involving border management, data-sharing, or fiscal exposure incorporate transparency duties, indemnity discipline, treaty stress triggers, and democratic consent safeguards.

The objective is to reduce one-way transfer of risk, ensure publication of relevant fiscal and safeguarding metrics, and maintain constitutional clarity where overlapping jurisdictions interact.

9. Democratic Consent and Reconciliation

GRACE ultimately advances a reconciliation discipline: the principle that cumulative exposure should remain intelligible to democratic oversight. By linking thresholds to publication, attribution, and re-authorisation cycles, the model seeks to restore a clearer relationship between public risk, public cost, and public consent.

In this sense, the framework is not a fixed policy blueprint but a governance instrument. Its purpose is to ensure that complex systems remain legible under pressure — and that accountability remains visible where exposure, sovereignty, and public trust intersect.

10. Methodology and Ongoing Governance Analysis

The GRACE Framework is presented in this Green Paper as a governance methodology intended to support transparent analysis of complex public policy systems. While the Green Paper sets out the architecture and principles of the framework, the methodology is designed to be capable of application to real governance arrangements as they emerge.

Where new institutional developments arise — including treaty frameworks, legislative reforms, or complex administrative systems — the GRACE methodology can be applied to examine governance architecture, fiscal attribution, safeguarding integrity, and democratic consent mechanisms.

Examples of applied governance analysis are published through the Young Policy platform to support transparent public discussion of evolving governance systems.

Governance Principles

The GRACE framework examines complex public policy systems through several underlying governance principles. At their core, these principles can be expressed through a set of simple questions:

- Should risks be published or hidden?
- Should fiscal exposure be attributable or opaque?
- Should safeguarding thresholds be automatic or discretionary?

These questions do not prescribe policy outcomes. They simply highlight the governance choices that determine whether complex public systems remain transparent, accountable, and capable of democratic scrutiny.

Contact and Access

This Executive Summary is a standalone extract from The GRACE Framework — A Governance & Accountability Green Paper.

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