

# **Grenfell Tower Inquiry diary week 69: ‘It was just unthinkable, you had the makings here of a crisis that you simply couldn’t conceive of’**



On 6 January 2005, fire tore through a tower block called The Edge in Manchester. The fire ripped up 17 storeys in 10 minutes, spread along the roof and began to move down the building.

The building was only partially occupied at the time of the

blaze, but the local fire service warned of “grave concerns” that a similar fire could put “the lives of occupants at risk”.

The fire spread through decorative ‘sandwich panels’ on the exterior of the building, which were made of aluminium held together with polystyrene foam insulation.

Once more, these panels, despite their devastating performance in the fire, were Class 0 rated – and therefore compliant with Approved Document B.

Mr Martin, still employed by BRE at the time, was actively working on a major review of the document. He recognised that it needed to change.

In an email 12 days after the fire, he wrote that Approved Document B was “in need of clarification” because “changes in construction practice” had “circumvented” the “intent of the original guidance”.

He attached some suggested wording to the email, which would have revised the relevant passage to require all external wall products to be “materials of limited combustibility”. This was a much higher standard than Class 0 and would essentially ban everything combustible.

But Mr Martin also said that this draft “still needs some work” because it would have banned things such as timber-framed construction.

The government released a consultation document on the

proposed changes in July 2005. But this document was silent on the question of how to deal with this problem of external fire spread exemplified by the fire at The Edge.

“Why didn’t that happen?” asked Mr Millett.

“It was difficult to insert a new piece of subject matter without falling foul of various government processes, which would have delayed the publication of the consultation,” Mr Martin said.

Despite not raising the issue, it was addressed in a response by the National House Building Council (NHBC), which mentioned the risk from “metal cladding panels that use polystyrene as a filler”.

As a result of this, Mr Martin helped to redraft Paragraph 12.7 of Approved Document B – which was headed ‘insulation materials/products’ – to say that it also covered “filler materials etc” and required them to be of ‘limited combustibility’.

An enormous amount turns on the meaning of these words. Because Mr Martin also left in the previous passage, which required a Class 0 standard for the external surfaces of walls.

He has now claimed that “filler” was supposed to apply to the core of any composite cladding panel, meaning that from this day forward, cladding like ACM should not have been used on high rises.

But it has never been clear what the word 'filler' actually meant. Many in the industry, including [some of the inquiry's expert witnesses](#), say they took it to mean 'Polyfilla' materials used to plug up gaps.

Mr Millett memorably illustrated this point by bringing a can of Polyfilla to the inquiry and brandishing it at Mr Martin (pictured above).

"Did anyone think: well, filler could be thought of as that?" asked Mr Millett.

"I don't think we thought that at the time, no," said Mr Martin.

Another problem was that it was included in a paragraph marked 'insulation/products', which cladding panels are not.

"If you intended the text... to apply to any materials or products other than insulation, why did you put it under a paragraph headed 'insulation materials/products'?" Mr Millett asked.

Mr Martin said he believed that the '/products' in the title meant the paragraph applied to things other than insulation.

"I wish I could remember what was exactly in our minds at the time, other than that general statement that we were trying to be more broader," he said.

Mr Martin included no definition of the word 'filler' in the

guidance, despite an appendix specifically for definitions.

“The problem with producing definitions of terms is that you then find everybody argues about what the words in the definition mean. So if you’re trying to get people to think broadly, then a definition can be counterproductive,” he said.

He also made no reference to the change in a circular sent to the industry or a summary of the significant changes included in the guidance itself.

Mr Martin said the ‘filler’ change “didn’t come on the list” because the change was made “late in the process”.

“Wasn’t the simpler approach simply to have a new paragraph which was perhaps headed ‘core of external panels’, and required those to be of limited combustibility? What was the problem with doing that?” asked Mr Millett.

“I think there was a concern that by identifying a specific product in a very prescriptive way, that might fall foul of having not consulted specifically on that, and that there’s a risk of manufacturers challenging the department and you find yourself dealing with a judicial review,” replied Mr Martin.

Asked if this was therefore “really more about... keeping it under the radar” and making the change “sufficiently quietly that people wouldn’t make a fuss”, Mr Martin said: “I think there was a component of that in the thinking, yes.”

This would not be the last chance to make a clearer statement that dangerous cladding was banned before Grenfell. All of them would be missed.

## **Module one: the refurbishment**

### **Week one: A vivid picture of a broken industry**

After a week of damning revelations at the opening of phase two of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, *Peter Apps* recaps the key points

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### **Week two: What is the significance of the immunity application?**

Sir Martin Moore-Bick has written to the attorney general requesting protection for those set to give evidence at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. *Peter Apps* explains what the move means

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### **Week three: Architects of misfortune**

This week saw the lead architects for the Grenfell Tower refurbishment give evidence to the inquiry. *Peter Apps* runs through the key points

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## **Week four: ‘I didn’t have any perception that it was the monster it’s become’**

The architects continued to give evidence this week, outlining a lack of understanding of the fire risk posed by the cladding materials and its design. *Nathaniel Barker* reports

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## **Week five: ‘No adverse effect in relation to external fire spread’**

As the Grenfell Tower Inquiry returns from its long absence, *Peter Apps* recaps the key points from a week of important evidence from the fire consultants to the refurbishment

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## **Week six: ‘I can’t recall any instance where I discussed the materials with building control’**

*Nathaniel Barker* summarises what we learned from fire engineers Exova, architects Studio E and the early evidence from contractor Rydon

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## **Week seven: ‘I do not think I have ever worked with a contractor operating with this level of nonchalance’**

Two key witnesses from contractor Rydon gave evidence this

week. *Peter Apps* recaps some of the key points from a revealing week of evidence

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### **Week eight: 'It haunts me that it wasn't challenged'**

Four witnesses from contractor Rydon gave evidence this week. *Lucie Heath* recaps what we learned on the last week of evidence before the inquiry breaks for five weeks

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### **Week nine: 'All I can say is you will be taken out for a very nice meal very soon'**

This week the inquiry heard evidence from witnesses at Harley Facades, the sub-contractor responsible for Grenfell Tower's cladding. *Peter Apps* recaps the key points

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### **Week 10: 'As we all know, ACM will be gone rather quickly in a fire!'**

As the Grenfell Tower Inquiry entered its 10th week, *Jack Simpson* recaps the key points from a week of important evidence from the refurbishment's cladding contractor

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### **Week 11: 'Did you get the impression Grenfell Tower was a**



## **guinea pig for this insulation?’**

With witnesses from the cladding subcontractor, the firm which cut the deadly panels to shape and the clerk of works which inspected the job giving evidence this was week full of revelations. *Peter Apps* recaps the key points

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## **Week 12: ‘Would you accept that was a serious failing on your part?’**

With the surveyor who inspected Grenfell Tower for compliance giving evidence, this was a crucial week from the inquiry. *Dominic Brady* and *Peter Apps* report

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## **Week 13: ‘Value for money is to be regarded as the key driver for this project’**

With consultants to Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) giving evidence, attention at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry turned for this first time to the actions of the TMO and the council. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 14: ‘Did it not occur to you at this point that your budget was simply too low?’**

This week, for the first time in phase two, the inquiry heard from Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, the landlord that oversaw the fatal refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. *Lucie Heath* reports

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### **Week 15: ‘Have you ever informed the police that you destroyed documents relevant to their investigation?’**

Witnesses from the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) gave evidence for a second week, which began with a shocking revelation about withheld and destroyed evidence. *Peter Apps* recaps

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### **Week 16: ‘I conclude this was very serious evidence of professional negligence’**

This week saw members of Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation finish giving evidence, before the inquiry’s expert witnesses took the stand to make some highly critical assessments of the work they had seen before and during the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. *Jack Simpson* recaps

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### **Grenfell Tower: a timeline of the refurbishment**

Following the conclusion of module one of the Grenfell

Inquiry's second phase, *Peter Apps* presents a timeline of the key moments during the fatal refurbishment of the west London tower block

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## **Module two: the cladding products**

### **Week 17: 'It's hard to make a note about this because we are not clean'**

The start of the second module of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase two came with some huge revelations about the companies that sold the products used in the cladding system. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 18: 'It was just reckless optimism wasn't it?'**

As the inquiry began cross-examining witnesses for the second module of its phase two work, the picture surrounding just how Grenfell Tower ended up wrapped in such dangerous materials became a little clearer. *Nathaniel Barker* was keeping an eye on proceedings

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### **Week 19: 'And that was intentional, deliberate, dishonest?'**

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry this week heard the shocking

story of how the insulation manufacturer “manipulated” official testing and marketed its product “dishonestly”. *Peter Apps* tells the story

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### **Week 20: ‘We were outed by a consultant who we then had to fabricate a story to’**

This week the inquiry investigated the actions of Kingspan – the manufacturer of one of the insulation products used in the tower’s cladding system. *Dominic Brady* reports

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### **Week 21: ‘It’s there in black and white isn't it? We see a complete absence of any consideration of life safety’**

The story of insulation giant Kingspan’s testing and marketing of its combustible insulation for high rises was unpacked in minute detail this week. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 22: ‘All we do is lie in here’**

In the third week of evidence from insulation giant Kingspan, the inquiry continued to uncover shocking details about the firm’s behaviour both before and after the Grenfell Tower fire. *Lucie Heath* reports

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## **Week 23: 'That would have come as an earthquake to you at the time, would it not?'**

This week the inquiry took its deepest dive yet into the inner workings of the cladding manufacturer whose product has been blamed for the terrible spread of fire up Grenfell Tower. *Nathaniel Barker* reports

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## **Week 24: 'Do you accept that Test 5B was Arconic's deadly secret'**

The president of the firm that made and sold the cladding panels installed on Grenfell Tower was asked to account for the apparent concealment of "disastrous" fire tests on the product this week. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 25: 'This is quite an incredible list of omissions and missed instances, isn't it?'**

This week the Grenfell Tower Inquiry heard its first witnesses from the Building Research Establishment (BRE) - the testing house which carried out key fire tests on the Kingspan and Celotex insulation products which were later used on Grenfell Tower. *Peter Apps* reports.

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## **Week 26: 'You were taking an enormous risk, weren't**

**you?'**

Week 26 at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry was a key moment in understanding how dangerous products used on the tower came to be accepted by industry professionals. *Dominic Brady* reports

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**Week 27: 'What will happen if one building made out [of] PE core is in fire and will kill 60 to 70 persons?'**

The most explosive evidence this week at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry came from those who did not attend, as the evidence which would have been presented to Arconic witnesses was displayed in their absence. *Peter Apps* reports

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**Week 28: 'This is a serious safety matter'**

This week the Grenfell Tower Inquiry zeroed in on the British Board of Agrément, the body that produced "misleading" certificates which inspired trust in both the cladding and insulation used on the tower. *Lucie Heath* reports

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**Week 29: 'Is it true that Kingspan's position... was to do its best to ensure that science was secretly perverted for financial gain?'**

The final week in this section of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry primarily examined the attempts by insulation manufacturer Kingspan to lobby government after the fire. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **How the products used in Grenfell Tower's cladding system were tested and sold**

As the section of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry examining how the products used in the cladding system were tested, marketed and sold comes to a close, *Peter Apps* summarises what we have learned about each of the products included in the system

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## **Module Three: the management of the tower**

### **Week 30: 'There is certainly a high probability that in the event of a fire the whole building can become an inferno'**

The focus of the inquiry shifted this week to the actions of the social housing providers responsible for maintaining Grenfell Tower. *Pete Apps* recaps what we learned

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### **Week 31: 'If we cannot get out people will die'**

This week saw the former residents of Grenfell Tower enter

the witness box to tell of their experiences attempting to raise complaints with the council and its managing agent. *Pete Apps* reports

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### **Week 32: 'Let's hope our luck holds and there isn't a fire'**

This week saw the return of the landlord of Grenfell Tower, Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), as senior staff members attempted to explain how vital fire safety protections at the block were allowed to fall into disrepair. *Lucie Heath* reports

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### **Week 33: 'Isn't that a serious gap in the scope of a policy meant to safeguard vulnerable people?'**

A slightly disjointed week at the Grenfell Tower inquiry saw further evidence from staff at building manager Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) interspersed with the views of a cladding expert. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 34: 'Some members of the community are doing their best to spread false information'**

*Jack Simpson* covers all the major revelations from the past week of evidence at the Grenfell Inquiry, including evidence



from Laura Johnson, director of housing at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

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### **Week 35: 'I really didn't like the champagne'**

This week the Grenfell Tower Inquiry saw council witnesses, including former deputy leader Rock Feilding-Mellen and leader Nicholas Paget-Brown, questioned about their role in the story for the first time. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 36: 'Is that not a very incurious approach for a fire risk assessor?'**

This week the Grenfell Tower Inquiry scrutinised the work of Carl Stokes, the man hired to carry out fire risk assessments for the block. *Nathaniel Barker* reports

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### **Week 37: 'In giving that advice, weren't you acting beyond your knowledge and expertise?'**

A curtailed week at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry saw fire risk assessor Carl Stokes grilled over advice he gave regarding the tower's cladding. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 38: ‘Well it’s a bit more than that, isn’t it. He’s suggesting that you tell the LFB a lie’**

The inquiry heard the mammoth cross-examination of KCTMO’s health and safety manager Janice Wray this week. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 39: ‘What you said there was a grotesque understatement’**

This week the inquiry continued to hear from former employees of Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, as well as two employees from the London Fire Brigade. *Lucie Heath* reports

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## **Week 40: ‘An exercise in concealment and half-truth’**

Former KCTMO chief executive Robert Black gave his evidence to the inquiry this week and was asked to account for the various failures described over the previous six weeks. *Peter Apps* and *Nathaniel Barker* report.

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## **Week 41: ‘We should do nothing. This is not the sort of website we should be responding to’**

This week saw the return of Robert Black, chief executive of

Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), before the inquiry turned its attention to the defective smoke control system in the tower. *Dominic Brady* reports

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### **Week 42: 'They would leak as much as they leaked. They were what they were'**

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry continued its in-depth investigation of the tower's non-compliant smoke control system this week, with evidence from the various contractors involved in delivering it. *Pete Apps* reports

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### **Week 43: 'Contractors at the time were not generally aware of the importance of leaving holes unsealed'**

This week the inquiry focused on two of the more overlooked areas of the Grenfell Tower fire, with evidence focusing on the gas pipelines and lifts within the west London block. It was a packed week, with five witnesses giving evidence. *Jack Simpson* reports

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### **Week 44: 'I've never seen a fully compliant firefighting lift in any local authority building, to this day actually'**

This week the inquiry turn the focus onto the building's

defective lifts, with evidence from an expert, contractors who worked on them and a former engineer at KCTMO. *Pete Apps* reports.

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### **Week 45: ‘Don’t you find all this rather a surprising debate, given that the Equality Act was passed in 2010?’**

The inquiry heard from expert witness Colin Todd this week, who gave his views about the work of risk assessor Carl Stokes as well as answered questions about his own guidance. *Peter Apps* and *Nathaniel Barker* report

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### **Week 46: ‘I think I've been very, very clear that is completely wrong’**

This week the inquiry heard further expert evidence about fire risk assessor Carl Stokes’ actions, as the section of its work covering the management and maintenance of the tower concluded. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Six key failures in the way Grenfell Tower was managed before the fire**

*Peter Apps* recaps some of what we have learned about the actions of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management

Organisation (KCTMO) in the years before the fire.

## **Module one and two closing statements**

### **Week 47: 'An unedifying spectacle'**

After a week of closing statements from the core participants involved in modules one and two, *Lucie Heath* recaps the key arguments of each group

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## **Module five: the fire brigade**

### **Week 48: 'They knew, and lives could and should have been saved'**

The phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry examining the actions of the London Fire Brigade in the years before the fire kicked off this week with some major revelations. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 49: 'I'm not sure we've always taken every opportunity to learn as an organisation'**

How the London Fire Brigade acted upon lessons from incidents in the years before the Grenfell Tower disaster came under the microscope this week at the public inquiry. *Nathaniel Barker* reports

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**Week 50: ‘There is a culture in LFB that is very conservative. I think there is great comfort in what is familiar’**

This week the inquiry heard how the London Fire Brigade (LFB) elected not to issue warnings about dangerous cladding before Grenfell and a detailed examination of its policy for checking high risk buildings. *Pete Apps* reports.

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**Week 51: ‘We teach firefighters to expect building failure’**

An unusually brief week of evidence at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry explored how a fire service neighbouring London was taking a different approach to tackling blazes in high rises. *Nathaniel Barker* reports

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**Week 52: ‘I actually think that there is a measure of incompetence at all levels’**

Expert evidence concluded the current section of the inquiry with some stinging criticism of the London Fire Brigade (LFB). *Pete Apps* and *Grainne Cuffe* report.

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**Module six: fire services**

## **Week 53: ‘They make for chilling reading and harrowing listening’**

The inquiry’s investigation into central government began this week with lawyers setting out their view on how and why firefighting policies failed. *Peter Apps* and *Lucie Heath* report

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## **Week 54: ‘Our consideration of evacuation at this time was something of a blind spot’**

The development of policy on ‘stay put’, both nationally and for London, occupied the attention of the inquiry this week. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 55: ‘My review is pretty scathing!’**

In a week that included the 200th day of evidence in phase two of the inquiry, attention turned to the London Fire Brigade’s control room. *Lucie Heath* reports

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## **Week 56: ‘Why didn't we thump the table harder’**

This week, the control room at the London Fire Brigade was examined further – both before and after the fire. *Pete Apps* and *Lucie Heath* report

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## **Week 57: 'It was worse than slow, it was sluggish'**

Former London Fire Brigade (LFB) commissioner Dany Cotton was the star witness this week, as the inquiry continued to delve into the brigade's knowledge and training before the Grenfell Tower fire. *Jack Simpson, Grainne Cuffe and Pete Apps* report

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## **Week 58: 'I don't think we deserve to ask for trust until we demonstrate different outcomes'**

A current and former commissioner of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) wrapped up the inquiry's investigation into the actions of the brigade before the fire. *Grainne Cuffe and Peter Apps* report.

## **Module six: testing and government**

### **One of the major scandals of our time: key revelations as the Grenfell Tower Inquiry turns to government**

The government was accused of "covering up" the risks of dangerous cladding as its "unbridled passion for deregulation" left it a "junior party" to the construction industry as the latest phase of the public inquiry opened today. *Peter Apps* summarises some of the main points

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## **Week 59: 'Recent tests have apparently shown it continued to burn for 20 minutes after the flame was taken away'**

After shocking opening statements, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry turned its attention to the work of Local Authority Building Control. *Pete Apps* reports

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## **Week 60: 'You could have an exact repeat of the Dubai fire in any number of buildings in London'**

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry turned its attention to the work of the National House Building Council this week, with shocking revelations about the extent of the warnings issued to central government before the fire. *Peter Apps* reports

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## **Week 61: 'Mistakes are meant for learning, not repeating'**

In the first hearings of the new year, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry heard closing statements from the firefighting section of phase two. *Lucie Heath* reports

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## **Week 62: Did it ever occur to you that this act of collaboration was, in one sense, corrupting?**

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry returned to the work of the

National House Building Council (NHBC) this week, with a new shocking revelation about the government's actions in the immediate aftermath of the fire. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 63: 'It came after the general move to deregulation. So more regulation was not welcome'**

The government's focus on deregulation before the Grenfell Tower fire was placed in the spotlight this week with a series of shocking revelations about its failure to amend fire safety guidance. *Pete Apps* and *Grainne Cuffe* report

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### **Week 64: 'I didn't think ACM would be suitable for use in any high-rise buildings. I don't think anyone did'**

This week, the Building Research Establishment's Dr Sarah Colwell gave more than three days of evidence, with some huge revelations about what was known about the dangers of aluminium composite material years before the fire and the mass confusion over the government's building regulations. *Peter Apps* and *Jack Simpson* report

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### **Week 65: 'Unless the government does something now about ACM panels, people will die'**

Further evidence from the Building Research Establishment

and the first government witnesses added new depth to our understanding of how warnings were missed before the Grenfell Tower fire. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 66: ‘Was there a cover-up?’**

The latest evidence from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry tracked the government’s failure to act on fire safety warnings right up until the months before the fire. *Peter Apps* and *Grainne Cuffe* report

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### **Week 67: ‘When exposed to a fire, the aluminium melts away and exposes the polyethylene. Whoosh!’**

This week the inquiry heard disturbing new evidence about the failure of senior government officials to act on warnings about dangerous cladding in the years before the Grenfell Tower fire. *Peter Apps* reports

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### **Week 68: ‘Can we agree that was a pretty dangerous thing to have, all this falling on one man’s shoulders?’**

Three senior civil servants gave evidence this week, including the official who had responsibility for building regulations guidance on fire safety in the years before Grenfell. *Peter Apps*, *Lucie Heath*, *Stephen Delahunty* and *Grainne*

*Cuffe* report

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