

BESA: Lack of competence behind Grenfell 'buck passing'

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) says the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower disaster, which closed last week, was a timely reminder of the need to focus on “technical and professional competence”.

Lawyers summing up the 400-days of evidence said they had been shocked at the level of “buck-passing” with companies seemingly more interested in protecting their own legal position than getting to the truth to prevent a similar tragedy happening again.

However, BESA said this would have come as no surprise to most people involved with the construction sector. Chief executive David Frise said shifting blame to others was a “tried and tested tactic” used to cover up incompetence and lack of technical rigour.

“Some of the unedifying behaviour we have seen during the inquiry is deeply embarrassing to our industry, but should inspire us all to do better,” said Frise. “The tragedy has also led directly to the new Building Safety Act, which should, if properly enforced, leave no hiding place for people looking to cheat the system – or who can’t be bothered to do their jobs properly.”

The inquiry established that every one of the 72 deaths in the 2017 fire was avoidable but lead counsel Richard Millett KC said there had been a collective “failure to take responsibility”. He presented “a spider’s web of blame” that illustrated how different parties tried to shift blame on to others.

‘Nobody to blame’

He said if all the statements to the inquiry had been accurate “then nobody was to blame for the Grenfell Tower fire. Can that really be right?”

Millett said that the scale of the tragedy “ought to have provoked a strong sense of public responsibility...but many core participants appear simply to have used the inquiry as an opportunity to position themselves for any legal proceedings...to minimise their own exposure to legal liability.”

The blame shifting seemed to be part of defensive tactics aimed at covering up “incompetence, lack of skill and experience, false and unverified assumptions, and plain carelessness or lack of engagement”, he added.

“There will have been many times in the evidence when I don’t doubt that you will have been struck by how many witnesses thought that something was somebody else’s job, but never bothered to check.”

The Metropolitan Police are waiting for the inquiry panel to deliver its report before deciding whether to start criminal proceedings.

Frise said he did not believe that most of the people who worked on the Grenfell refurbishment “deliberately set out to do a bad job”, but they were part of a culture that encouraged people to “play fast and loose with specifications in a bid to keep costs down”.

“Also, not being able to do a job has not stopped people winning work in this industry for far too long. That will now have to change.”

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