

## Mr Robinson's sneaky visit to Greatham Parish Council

Greatham Parish Council meetings are held on the first Monday of each month. They are usually fairly quiet affairs, apart from the occasional arson attack on the cars in the car park. A few members of the public attend the meetings, and these are usually well known members of the village. On arrival, the members of the public are asked to sign in, so that there is a record of them should there be a fire.

On Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010, the usual Parish Council meeting was held, but on this occasion, a strange man attended the meeting. He wore a baseball cap throughout the meeting. He also signed himself into the meeting as "I P Daly" which seems a funny play on words. Following the meeting, he acted extremely oddly loitering in the car park and making mobile phone calls for some hour and a half during the exempt session at the end of the Parish Council meeting. Many people wondered who this strange man was and why he wanted to spend an evening at a Greatham Parish Council meeting.

However, all was revealed three days later when the same man turned up at the Grayshott Parish Council planning meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010. At this meeting, he was not wearing his baseball cap, but was acting in his capacity as Parish Councillor Ian Robinson!

Now, Mr. Ian Robinson is a very busy man. Not only is he a Parish Councillor, he is also a magistrate and a community school governor at Grayshott Primary School and member of the East Hampshire District Council Standards Committee. According to the EHDC website,



*"The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members through the Members' Code of Conduct"*

It would be nice to see the reports from the Standards Committee, but since 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009, no reports from the Standards Committee have been published on the EHDC website, even though four meetings have been held. At least we have now seen a copy of a minute of the Standards Committee Assessment Sub-Committee meeting of Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009 at which the members were considering complaints by a Mr D Shea against two Greatham Parish Councillors.

The Sub-Committee found that there was a potential breach of the Code of Conduct in terms of:

- **Failing to treat others with respect;**
- **Bring an office into disrepute (sic)**

The members of the Sub-Committee were Mr R Venables (Chairman), Mr I Robinson (Parish Member) and Cllr Mrs A C James, a close friend of the District Councillor for Greatham, Cllr Mrs Judy Onslow. At this time Mr Robinson presumably had not yet decided to change his name to I P Daly.

We have also now seen the Standards Committee Minutes of Thursday 28th January 2010. In that meeting the Council's Monitoring Officer suggested that Standards Committee members might like to visit some Town or Parish Council meetings, and that she would let them know which ones not to

attend. The Monitoring Officer also recommended that Members of the Committee **“should not attend a town or Parish Council meeting by themselves”**. So who else was with Mr Robinson on 1 February? Apparently no-one, although he did leave the meeting immediately followed by a Mr D Shea.

So what was Parish Councillor Ian Robinson, aka I P Daly, doing attending a Greatham Parish Council meeting unaccompanied (except possibly by Mr D Shea) without announcing his presence as a Parish Councillor or the EHDC Standards Committee and signing himself into the meeting in this way?

Certainly the Parish Councillors were not happy about this and submitted a complaint to EHDC about Mr Robinson’s behaviour. EHDC take such complaints very seriously so the Council’s Monitoring Officer referred the matter to their Standards Committee (of which, of course, Ian Robinson is a member!).

The response from the EHDC Standards Assessment sub-committee does not say whether Mr Robinson attended the meeting, or whether he declared an interest in the complaint about his behaviour. However if he was at the meeting, he certainly did not correct the error made by the Monitoring Officer of EHDC who, in the summary of the complaint, stated that Mr Robinson was a parish councillor for *Headley* Parish Council.

We only know that Mr Venables was the Chairman of the Standards Assessment Sub-Committee because the names of the rest of the Sub-Committee have been kept secret as usual. Just as there is no record of the date and topic of the meeting between Cllr Mrs Onslow, the Monitoring Officer and various members of Greatham Parish Council which took place at EHDC’s offices shortly after the May 2007 elections. Actually the topic of that meeting was how to dismiss Greatham Parish Council’s then Clerk who had the temerity to insist on submitting the Parish Council’s objections to a planning application by the business partner of Mr D Shea!

Fortunately for Mr Robinson, and perhaps not surprisingly, the EHDC Standards Assessment sub-committee (whoever they were) found that no action should be taken on the allegation:

The Assessment sub-committee did not consider there is evidence that Cllr Ian Robinson was conducting the business of his authority, either as a Parish Councillor or as a member of East Hampshire District Council's Standards Committee. There was also no evidence that he acted, claimed to act, or gave the impression that he was acting as a representative of the authority, namely Grayshott Parish Council or the East Hampshire District Council's Standards Committee. They concluded that he was not acting in his official capacity and the Code of Conduct did not apply.

The Assessment sub-committee also noted that section 52 of the Local Government Act 2000 applies to the Code of Conduct of Parish Councils and District Councils. This limits the remit of Codes of Conduct to activities undertaken by Members in their official capacity.

The Assessment sub-committee concluded that, even if they were wrong on this point, there was no evidence available to show that there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct of either Grayshott Parish Council or East Hampshire District Council. They recommended that no further action be taken.

So, that's fine then. Members of the EHDC Standards Committee are allowed to sneak around Parish Council meetings in disguise, signing themselves in using a false name. Or at least the EHDC Standards Committee does not have a problem with this behaviour.

**But why would they want to do this?**