Community Governance Review – Little Ponton and Stroxton Consultation Results Report

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update members of South Kesteven District Council's Community Governance Review Working Group (CGRWG) for Little Ponton and Stroxton and Full Council with the results of the Community Governance Review (CGR) for Little Ponton and Stroxton consultation.

Scope

2. This consultation was undertaken to:
   a) Inform the decision that will be taken by SKDC in respect of the local governance arrangements for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton. Three proposals were identified. These were:
      - To abolish the Parish Council of Little Ponton & Stroxton and re-classify the parish council as a Parish Meeting. No elections are held to elect councillors and the number of powers available to the parish meeting is limited.
      - To group Little Ponton & Stroxton Parish with Great Ponton Parish Council under a common council (an arrangement where two or more parishes join under a common parish council). Each parish retains its separate identity, electing at least one member onto the representative body but decisions about precepts and spending priorities are made by the common parish council.
      - To keep things as they are. The parish council of Little Ponton & Stroxton remains separate to the parish council of Great Ponton.

   b) Inform the decisions that will be taken by SKDC in respect of arrangements for the new parish council, should either of the alternative proposals be adopted. These include:
      - The name of any proposed grouped parish council (if applicable)
      - The number of councillors representing each of the parishes in a grouped parish council (if applicable)
      - The date of any proposed election of councillors (if required)

3. The results included in this report are from the first of two phases of consultation which may be undertaken as part of the Community Governance Review for Little Ponton and Stroxton. They will be used by the Community Governance Working Group and Full Council to inform their decision as to how the review will proceed. Should SKDC's Full Council decide to put forward some draft proposals on changes to the way in which this area could be governed locally (the second stage of consultation) a further consultation document will be sent to respondents who have indicated they would like to be kept informed of the outcome of the first stage of the review.

Objectives

4. The objectives of the consultation were identified as follows. To:
   a. Ensure those who may be affected by the proposals (i.e., those living or working in Little Ponton and Stroxton or Great Ponton) were aware that the community governance review was taking place and were given the opportunity to participate
   b. Measure the degree of support or otherwise for each of the proposals

c. Communicate the potential changes that may occur if either of the proposals advocating a change in governance arrangements were approved, and gather feedback on those proposed changes

d. Inform the decisions that will be taken by SKDC in respect of the arrangements for a parish council for Little Ponton and Stroxton (which will form the basis of the second stage of consultation)

e. Enable respondents to ask questions/seek clarification on any of the issues raised

Timescales

5. Preparatory work was undertaken during February and the first week of March. The consultation was open for six weeks – from 8 March till 19 April 2024. The results were presented to the CGRWG on 8 July 2024. A report detailing their recommendations will now be prepared for Full Council on 18 July 2024, to agree the next steps.

Stakeholders

6. The stakeholders were identified as follows:
   a) Households in Little Ponton and Stroxton and Great Ponton
   b) South Kesteven District Councillors
   c) Lincolnshire County Councillors (South Kesteven divisions)
   d) Lincolnshire County Council
   e) The Members of Parliament for the Grantham and Stamford and Sleaford and North Hykeham constituencies
   f) Local businesses
   g) Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council and Great Ponton Parish Council
   h) Any other person/organisation who appear to have an interest

Methodology

7. Different methods of engagement were used for different types of stakeholders. The table below identifies the method(s) used for each:

Stakeholders	Method(s)	Details
Households in the area under review. Also includes householders in the parish area adjacent to the area under review.	Direct mail to all households in Little Ponton and Stroxton and also those in Great Ponton Dedicated page on SKDC 's website www.southkesteven.gov.uk/GranthamCGR	Copies of survey and covering letter sent to 260 households on Friday 8 March. No surveys returned as undeliverable. (TBC) Page dedicated to the consultation went live on 8 March 2024. Contained link and QR code to survey

Members of SKDC's CGR for Little Ponton and Stroxton Working Group	Meetings to discuss the approach / content of consultation	The CGR Working Group met twice. Members were: Cllr TH, Cllr BL and Cllr CM Purpose of first meeting: To approve content for consultation Purpose of second meeting: To make recommendation and approve next steps in the CGR process
Other members of SKDC, Lincolnshire County Council, LCC South Kesteven Divisions, MPs for Grantham & Stamford and Sleaford & North Hykeham	Email	Email sent to all 56 members of SKDC and 14 members of LCC (SK divisions), LCC (organisation) and local MPs by JE at start of consultation period informing them of the consultation. MPs were: Grantham & Stamford - Gareth Davies Sleaford & North Hykeham - Dr Caroline Johnson
Parish Councils	Email	Email sent to Little Ponton and Stroxton and Great Ponton Parish Councils

Details

8. The decision to undertake a Community Governance Review to review the governance arrangements for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton was made at full Council on 23 November 2023[1], in response to a request from Councillor Ben Green. In order to determine the degree of support for three options for the future governance arrangements for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton, SKDC instructed its Head of Democratic Services, along with the Electoral Services Manager and the Council's Consultation Officer to consult various stakeholders. Actions undertaken included:

   a. Creation of a Community Governance Review Consultation Working Group for Little Ponton and Stroxton. This was made up of three members drawn from the Governance and Audit Committee. Their role was to approve the content and methodology of the consultation, consider the results of the consultation and make recommendations to Council.

   b. Preparation and printing of a letter and survey outlining the reasons for the consultation. The survey contained a map showing the areas which might be affected if a proposal to change the governance arrangements was approved

   c. Preparing, designing and setting up the on- line survey

   d. Contacting all parish councils, the district's MPs and other stakeholders (including local businesses) individually by email

   e. Inputting and analysing feedback from respondents

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[1] [Printed minutes 23rd-Nov-2023 14.00 Council.pdf](#)

f.　Preparing a report

9.　All households in the parishes of Little Ponton and Stroxton and also Great Ponton were contacted by letter. This outlined the purpose of the consultation and contained instructions on how households could participate, should they wish to. The envelope also contained a printed copy of the survey and a prepaid envelope, to encourage responses.

10.　The survey[2] included the following sections:
　　a.　An introduction. This included the purpose of the consultation, why their help was needed and how their feedback will be used to inform the Council's decision
　　b.　A question asking respondents if they thought the governance arrangements currently in place for the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton should be changed
　　c.　A question asking respondents -if they thought the governance arrangements should change- which option they would prefer
　　d.　A section asking respondents for their opinion on various principles designed to preserve the identity of individual parish councils when they merge
　　e.　Questions asking respondents if they have a preference as to when any changes should be implemented
　　f.　A section asking if respondents had any other questions
　　g.　A section asking respondents to supply their contact details if they wanted to be informed about the outcome of the first stage of the consultation
　　h.　Questions to capture what type of stakeholder they were, their address and postcode. The address question was made mandatory to help guard against responses being submitted from outside the area
　　i.　A thank you and closing date for the consultation

11.　Due to the limited scope of the review, the consultation was not promoted in the local media and on the Council's social media channels during the consultation period.

12.　The two Parish Councils which could potentially be affected by the proposals advocating a change in governance arrangements were contacted on the first day of the consultation period, as were other identified stakeholders.

13.　The consultation closed on 19 April 2024. 44 responses were received. 22 of these were completed on-line. 22 respondents chose to complete the printed survey – these were input manually by the Council's Consultation Officer.

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[2] Copy of survey attached at appendix three

14. The overall response rate to the Community Governance Review Consultation was 13.2%. This was calculated by dividing the total number of responses received by the total number of households/individuals contacted as follows:

Number of households/organisations/ specific individuals contacted

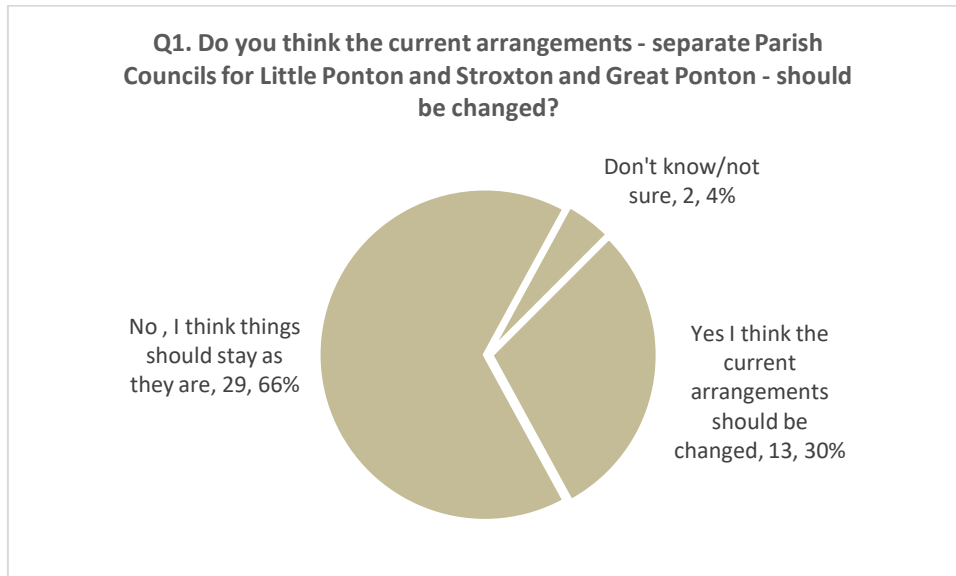|	
No of households contacted	260
No of parish councils contacted	2
No of LCC councillors contacted	14
No of SKDC councillors contacted	56
No of MPs contacted	2
Total number of households/organisations/specific individuals contacted	334

15. The response rates for those living in each of the parishes was calculated as follows: 260 households were contacted in total, of which 80 were in Little Ponton and Stroxton and 180 were in Great Ponton. 24 responses were received from households in Little Ponton and Stroxton (a response rate of 30%). 16 responses were received from households in Great Ponton (a response rate of 8.9%). Four responses were received from stakeholders who were not residents but were landlords of properties in Little Ponton (2), or parish council representatives. (2)

16. The statistical validity of the consultation has been determined by three factors. These are population size, the number of respondents and the confidence level. The margin of error for 44 responses drawn from a population of 260 at a 95% confidence level is 13.5%. The margin of error attached to these results is high –probably because the population is small and the number of responses to the consultation is low.

The results

17. To help those living in the parishes of Little Ponton and Stroxton or Great Ponton make an informed decision, the introduction to the survey included some contextual information on community governance reviews – what they are and why the Council decided to consider the governance arrangements currently in place in Little Ponton and Stroxton, in particular. As well as outlining the proposals, the survey included details of the current governance arrangements in both parishes, some information on the differences between a parish council and a parish meeting and what else the review would be required to consider – if a proposal to change governance arrangements was approved. A map of the areas covered by the review was also provided.

18. The first question asked respondents "Do you think the current arrangements - separate Parish Councils for Little Ponton and Stroxton and Great Ponton - should be changed?" Thirteen respondents (29.5%) agreed with this statement. Two thirds of respondents (29 or 65.9%) said that they thought things should stay as they are. This is illustrated on the graph below:

Q1. Do you think the current arrangements - separate Parish Councils for Little Ponton and Stroxton and Great Ponton - should be changed?

Don't know/not sure, 2, 4%

No , I think things should stay as they are, 29, 66%

Yes I think the current arrangements should be changed, 13, 30%

19. Cross tabulating the responses to question one against parish area revealed the majority of those responding from the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton were not in favour of changing the local governance arrangements for their area. Just under four out of five respondents (19 or 79.2%) said that they would prefer things to stay as they are. Those responding from the parish of Great Ponton were more ambivalent about the proposal, which is perhaps not surprising, with equal numbers of respondents (7 or 43.8%) choosing either "Yes, I think the current arrangements should be changed" or "No, I think things should stay as they are".

20. When given the opportunity to comment on this proposal, most respondents used the opportunity to provide an explanation as to why they were not in favour of changing the current governance arrangements. Some were concerned that the smaller villages of Little Ponton and Stroxton would be overwhelmed by the larger village of Great Ponton as illustrated in the comments below:

"Great Ponton is too large and Little Ponton and Stroxton could not be well represented being smaller."

"We believe that the needs of Great Ponton are different to those of Little Ponton and Stroxton and on the smaller group it would be overwhelmed by Great Ponton…"

The unique character of and prevalence of estate properties in Little Ponton and Stroxton was also mentioned:

"Barring one property, Little Ponton is an estate village and many of the issues and objectives faced by the parish council are sorted by the estate."

"Little Ponton and Stroxton parishes are very different in character to Great Ponton. They are traditional estate villages being part of Little Ponton Estate and Denton Estate…."
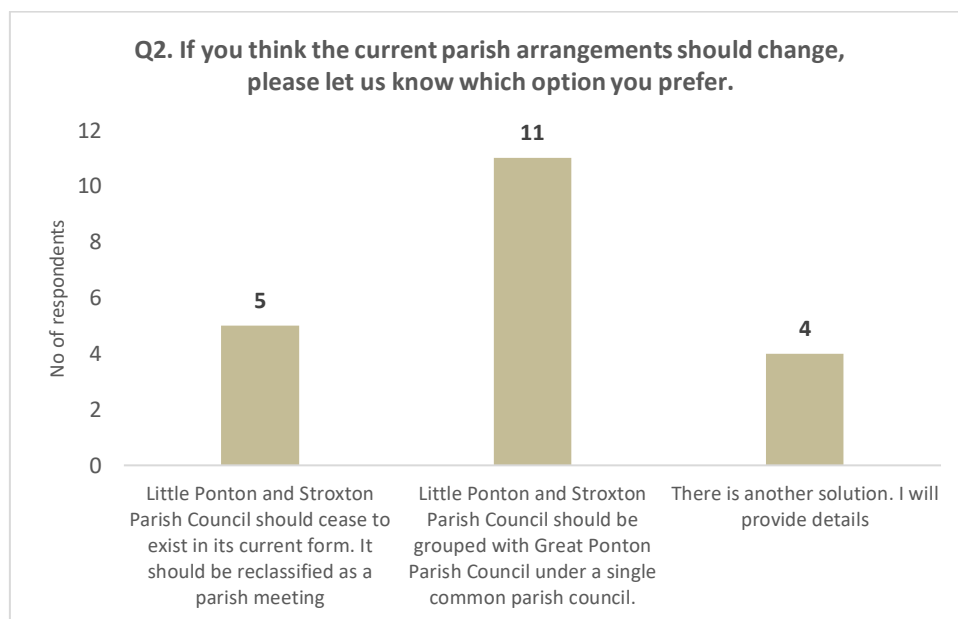
Others thought that concerns with the current parish council were not, on their own, a reason for a change in governance arrangements, and the community governance review process had already led to improvements:

"I believe that the current arrangements are the correct model with local representation at the devolved level of Stroxton and Little Ponton. The recent governance issues of the parish council do not undermine the suitability of the structure…."

"I believe that the current structure is the correct one and that it should be maintained. The fact that the council may not have been functioning as it should for a number of years does not mean that the structure itself is the wrong one but rather that those accountable for management of the structure have been less effective than they should have been."

"As I understand it, the structure is now under scrutiny at least partly because residents have agitated for improved governance and effectiveness of the current structure."

21. The next question on the survey asked respondents which option for future governance they preferred, if they wanted the governance arrangements for Little Ponton and Stroxton to change. A proposal to group the parish council of Little Ponton and Stroxton with Great Ponton was more popular than re-classifying Little Ponton and Stroxton as a parish meeting as illustrated on the graph here. The low number of responses to this question should however be noted.

Q2. If you think the current parish arrangements should change, please let us know which option you prefer.

Option	No of respondents
Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council should cease to exist in its current form. It should be reclassified as a parish meeting	5
Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council should be grouped with Great Ponton Parish Council under a single common parish council.	11
There is another solution. I will provide details	4

22. When offered an opportunity to comment, most used it as an opportunity to re-iterate that they didn't want the current governance arrangements to change, as shown here.
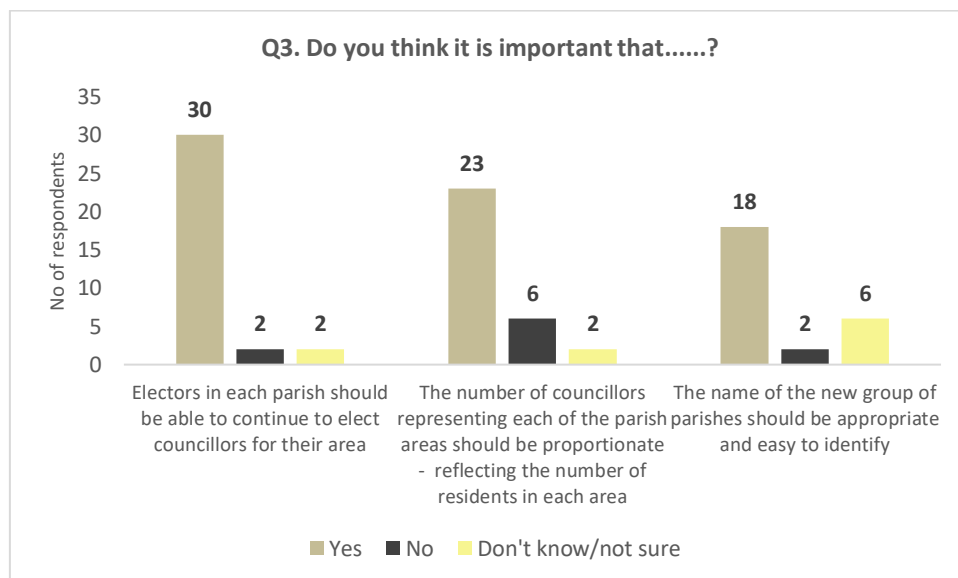
"It should remain the same as it is now"

One respondent thought that the whole structure should be abandoned

"Abolish all parish councils"

23. Respondents were then asked for their opinion on some principles which would govern the operation of any joint parish council, helping to ensure that the identity of individual parish councils can be preserved. These include ensuring that:

- Electors in each of the parishes continue to elect a number of councillors for their area
- The number of councillors representing each of the parish areas is proportionate, reflecting the number of residents in each area
- The name of the new group of parishes is appropriate and recognisable
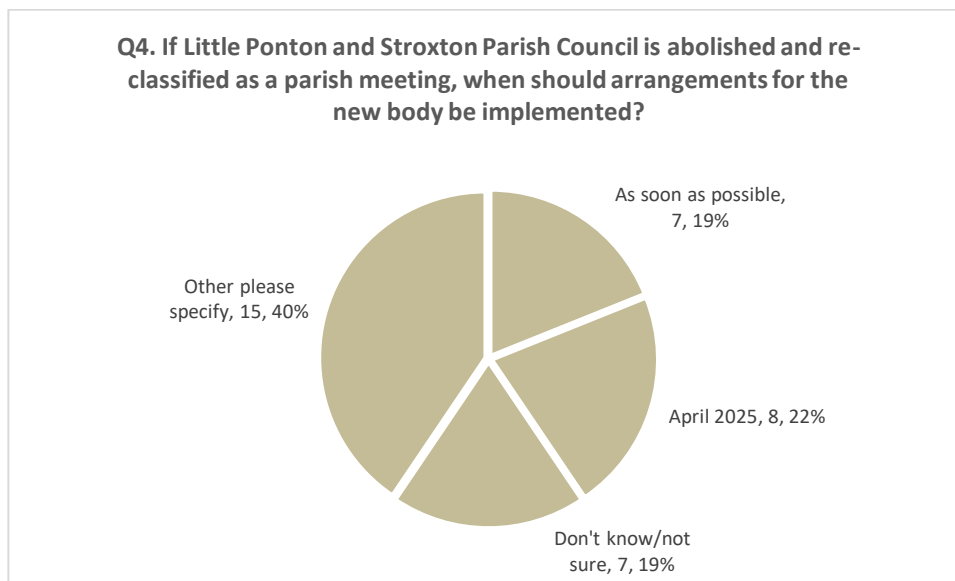
24. The graph below shows the number of respondents who thought that it was important that each of these principles is adhered to, if a joint parish council approach was approved. The percentage of those supporting each of these principles ranged from 69.2% of respondents who thought that the name of the new group of parishes should be appropriate and easy to identify to 88.2% of respondents who thought that electors in each of the parishes should be able to continue to elect a number of councillors for their area.

Q3. Do you think it is important that......?

25. When invited to comment on these principles, survey participants were keen to ensure that their views were acknowledged. Not in favour of a joint arrangement, the majority of those answering it used the opportunity to re-iterate their position. This is illustrated in the quote overleaf:

26. Keen to establish if electors residing in the parishes of either Little Ponton & Stroxton or Great Ponton have an opinion about when any changes should be implemented, respondents were then asked if Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council was to be abolished, and reclassified as a parish meeting, when the arrangements for the new body should be implemented. The distribution of responses shows no clear mandate for any of the choices, with "other, please specify" receiving the highest number of responses.

Q4. If Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish Council is abolished and re-classified as a parish meeting, when should arrangements for the new body be implemented?

- As soon as possible, 7, 19%
- April 2025, 8, 22%
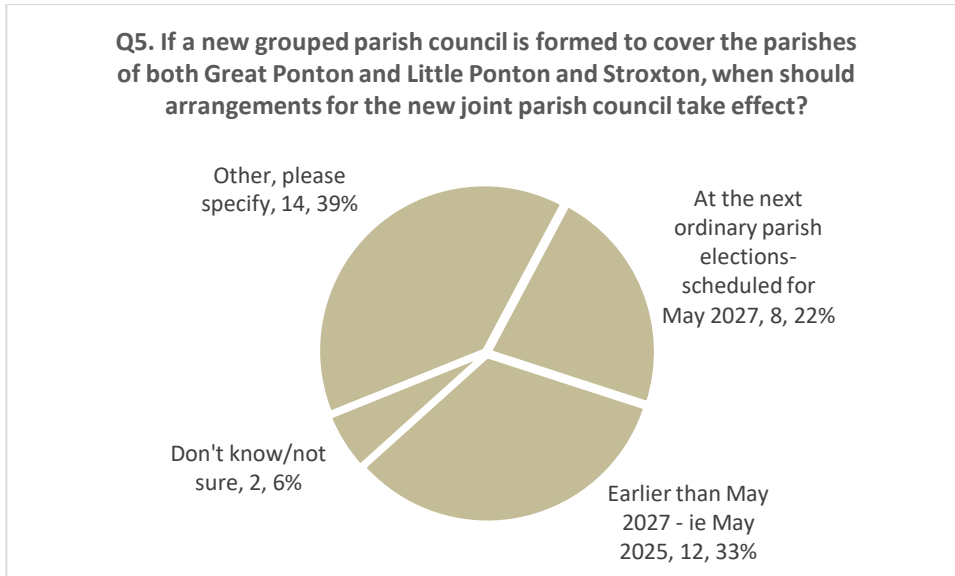- Don't know/not sure, 7, 19%
- Other please specify, 15, 40%

27. An analysis of the responses under the "other, please specify" category reveals why this choice attracted the most answers. Those taking part used it to object to the proposal as shown here:

"We do not want it to be re-classified as a parish meeting"

"Things should remain as they are with Little Ponton & Stroxton Parish Council to remain independent."

"Should not be implemented"

28. This was also the case when respondents were asked when any arrangements for the new joint parish council, if approved, should be implemented. When asked if they had a preference as to when a new grouped parish council should be formed to cover the parishes of both Little Ponton and Stroxton, and Great Ponton, the category attracting the most votes was "other, please specify". This is illustrated overleaf:

Q5. If a new grouped parish council is formed to cover the parishes of both Great Ponton and Little Ponton and Stroxton, when should arrangements for the new joint parish council take effect?

- Other, please specify, 14, 39%
- At the next ordinary parish elections- scheduled for May 2027, 8, 22%
- Don't know/not sure, 2, 6%
- Earlier than May 2027 - ie May 2025, 12, 33%

29. The quotes below are indicative of the comments received under the "other, please specify" answer category:

"I do not believe there should be a new grouped parish council"

"As I do not favour this option, I have simply selected the latest possible date offered."

Anything else

30. The sixth question on the survey asked respondents if they had any questions, or wanted to comment on anything included in the survey. A couple of respondents wanted to know why the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton had been selected for a community governance review, as opposed to anywhere else. Two respondents thought the survey was biased, because there was, in their opinion, too much of a focus on the proposals advocating change. Others used the opportunity to clearly state that they didn't want any change to the local governance arrangements for Little Ponton and Stroxton. These are illustrated in the quotes below:

"Is it only these parishes that are being considered for change or are there also others in the area, why has this change been proposed?"

"I am surprised by the seemingly directional bias-based outcome that this questionnaire is leading people to. This is disappointing, and I hope the only voice has listened to will be those of the residents of Little Ponton and Stroxton"

"This doesn't make sense for either community."

31. The next question asked respondents if they wanted to be informed about the results of the first stage of the community governance review for Little Ponton and Stroxton. 32 respondents (80%) said that they did. They will be contacted as soon as is practicable, once recommendations from the first stage of the community governance review process have been determined.

About you

32. Responses were received from a number of different stakeholders. These included: residents from the parishes of Little Ponton and Stroxton, and Great Ponton as well as parish, town, district and county councillors, parish councils and local businesses.

	No	%[3]
A resident of Little Ponton and Stroxton Parish	24	55.8
A resident of Great Ponton Parish	16	37.2
A parish, town, district or county councillor	5	11.6
Representing one of the parish councils	2	4.7
A local business	3	7.0
Other, please specify	6	14.0

33. Two responses were received from respondents living in the parish of Stoke Rochford and Easton. Further analysis revealed they were from participants who lived in the parish adjacent and owned properties in Little Ponton and Stroxton.

34. Most respondents supplied their full postcode, enabling a check to be undertaken to ensure that they were either a resident of the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton, or Great Ponton or one of the other stakeholders invited to participate. All postcodes supplied were for the areas of Little Ponton, Stroxton or Great Ponton. Two responses were from people living in the parish of Stoke Rochford and Easton.

Conclusion

35. Response rates for each of the parishes have been calculated. Over half (24 or 54.5%) were received from households in Little Ponton and Stroxton. Around a third (16 or 36.4%) were from households in Great Ponton. Making the address fields mandatory worked well, with all but six respondents supplying contact information. Postcodes were checked and found to be legitimate.

36. Cross tabulating the responses which asked respondents if they thought the current arrangements - separate Parish Councils for Little Ponton and Stroxton and Great Ponton - should be changed against their location revealed little support for either of the proposals advocating a change in governance

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[3] Respondents were instructed to tick all that apply. Percentages have been calculated by dividing the number of responses into the total number of respondents who answered this question (43)

arrangements – particularly from those living in the parish of Little Ponton and Stroxton. 79.2% of respondents said that they would prefer community governance arrangements to stay as they are.

37. An analysis of the free text comments made in response to this question revealed why this is the case. Respondents mentioned the unique nature of the properties in Little Ponton and Stroxton, and the role the estate plays in the village. Those living in Great Ponton were more ambivalent, which is perhaps not surprising.

38. Respondents used the free text sections throughout the survey to re-iterate their position. Most of the comments made were in favour of keeping the governance arrangements the same as they are now.

39. Members of the Community Governance Review Working Group are asked to note the contents of this report.

Prepared by Deb Wyles
Communications and Consultation
13 May 2024