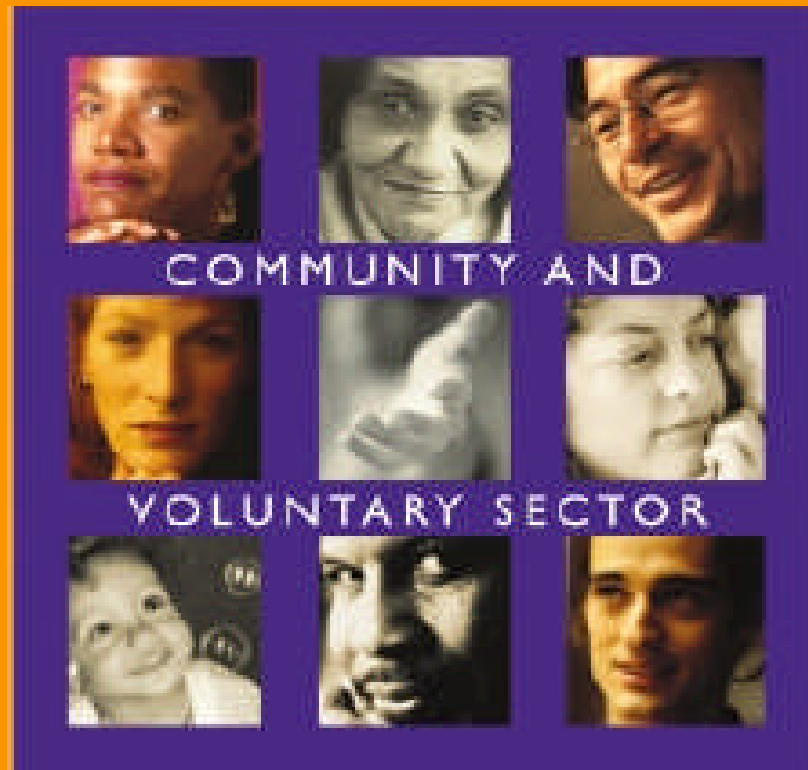


# UNISON



## CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED WEST MIDLANDS CVS BRANCH

*ANALYSIS OF CVS MEMBERS' SURVEY*

**AUGUST 2009**



*West Midlands*

## **Background**

The UNISON rule book states that “Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations include those providing services to local communities or campaigning organisations whose primary object is not that of making or securing financial profit”. Therefore, it has been recommended that all not for profit organisations including Housing Associations be included. All ‘for profit’ private sector organisations are excluded.

The Region currently has in excess of 4,500 members in the CVS who are generally members of the local geographic Branch most closely aligned to their area of work. There are very few properly organised membership groups in this sector. It is recognised that there are considerable and sometimes insurmountable difficulties in Branch Officers getting release to represent CVS members.

As a result, representation for casework and negotiation is either provided by lay Branch Officers operating outside their facility time agreements with their own employer or (more typically) by Regional Office staff. The impact of this is that both lay and organising staff resources are diverted to casework at the expense of organising work both in the CVS and with the host Branch’s core employers. Attempts have been made to organise in the CVS but whilst some success has been achieved this work has been at best patchy and piecemeal. These new proposals would help UNISON focus more on organising in core and CVS employers.

The Regional Committee consisting of elected lay activists decided to commence a consultation process on how to address the problems in organising in the CVS. It was decided to consult on a proposal to establish a Regional Branch for CVS members. This paper outlines the result of this consultation.

A detailed mapping exercise has identified a total of 5,436 CVS members currently contained in 57 Branches of UNISON across the Region. The Branch income from these members will be large enough to fund the Branch and enable it to employ dedicated organisers to represent and negotiate on behalf of CVS members.

Once the new Branch has been established it would have a similar relationship with the Organisers in the BCVS Team as any other Branch would have with Regional Organisers i.e. the BCVS Team would assist with organising and recruitment, complex casework and negotiations.

There is huge recruitment potential within the CVS for any Union that can achieve this. There are a total of 58,000 workers currently employed in the CVS in the West Midlands Region (including Housing Associations). UNISON’s membership density is just 9.1%. These employees, such as care workers, nurses and housing officers, would be UNISON’s natural membership if employed and organised in the NHS or Local Government.

## Executive Summary

Exercises such as this survey, working closely with our membership, is crucial if we are to establish a visible, credible and effective network of workplace representatives in the CVS sector as we aim to make UNISON the union of choice for workers in the CVS field.

### Response rate

A total of 4,635 questionnaires were sent out to CVS members in the West Midlands. A total of 289 responses were received equating to a response rate of 6.2%. The gender breakdown of the responses was broadly in line with the CVS gender profile with 70% of responses coming from women.

### Organising opportunity

The survey has represented a significant organising tool. Indeed, it has identified a possible 56 members who have expressed a willingness to consider becoming more active by becoming a representative or contact. This is of the utmost importance and should not be forgotten as we seek to grow the union.

### Support

There is strong support for the proposals from ordinary members. Nonetheless, it is also clear that this significant support is allied with a need to provide further explanation and clarity for CVS members as we move forward towards the establishment of a fully functioning branch. Support for the CVS branch is significant with just 5% of respondents stating an objection to the proposals

### Present structure

It is evident that a substantial number of members in the CVS are unaware of which branch they belong to. A total of 118 respondents were unable to identify their branch with 41 of these naming the Regional Office at Livery Street as their branch.

### Satisfaction levels

Satisfaction with the existing branch and Regional structures indicating that there is significant room for improvement in terms of organising within the CVS. All but one of the respondents who were dissatisfied with advice/support from their branch were from ordinary members, whereas 'dissatisfaction' with Region tended to be broader with more Stewards stating their disappointment.

### Involvement with UNISON democracy

The survey has shown that only 10% of members within the CVS are attending meetings. It is evident that a combination of reasons are acting as barriers for attending meetings. However, 89 respondents stated that they would like to be more involved with UNISON democracy which is a very encouraging figure.

The responses have demonstrated a strong preference for quarterly meetings. Given the difficulties for many members in attending meetings this may well be the sensible solution. This would allow regular decision making to occur without an overly burdensome monthly commitment. Hopefully, this solution would maximise attendance at CVS branch meetings.

However, there was no consensus as to when meetings should be held other than a strong majority in favour of weekday meetings as opposed to weekend meetings. As a consequence, the precise timings of the meetings would need to be a decision taken by the branch and regularly reviewed to determine if the timings are appropriate

Rotation meetings around the Region emerged as the favoured approach. Indeed, such a rotating basis would help to facilitate more members coming to meetings and making the branch seem more regional as opposed dominated by one particular area.

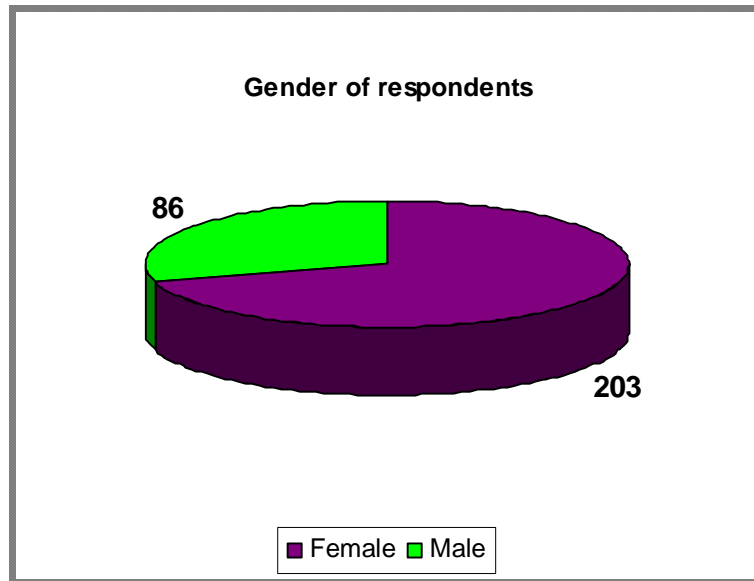
Of the 27 stewards and contacts identified in the survey, only 2 felt they had considerable influence in shaping UNISON policy which is a disappointing figure. A solid network of stewards and contacts are the heart of any branch

#### Communication

A majority of respondents preferred to receive information via the post as opposed to email. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of responses indicated that they were happy to receive electronic communication. Given the cost savings this would entail and CVS branch should look to maximise this communication as much as possible, without undermining the obvious preference of many members for postal communication. Therefore, any CVS branch website should look to include an 'e-shot' functionality that would enable email communication direct with members as opposed to relying directly upon members to visit the website for information

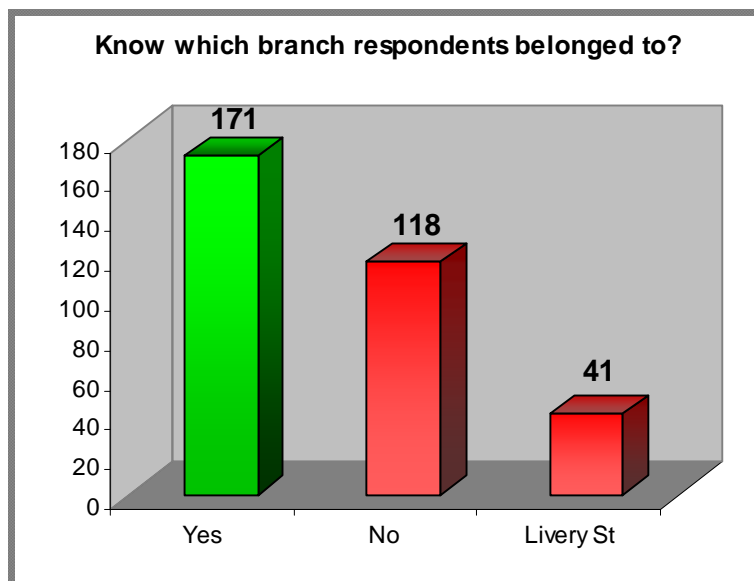
### Information about the respondents

7% of respondents to the survey were female which is broadly in line with the gender breakdown in the CVS..

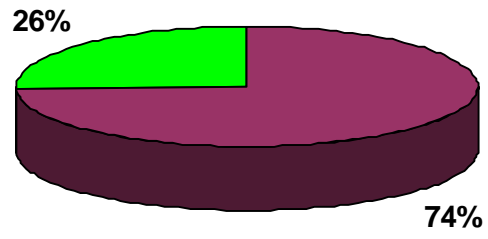


Possibly the most illuminating finding that materialised from the survey was a finding that was not originally sought. The survey asked respondents to name which branch they were a member of in order that we could identify them easily if needed. However, a significant proportion identified the wrong branch or had no idea of their branch. 24% of respondents named the Regional Office as their branch. A total of 41% of all members who responded were unable to correctly identify their branch.

This stark figure gives strong support to the need for change in how CVS members are organised. The fact that 41% of the respondents did not know which branch they belonged to strongly reinforces anecdotal evidence that CVS members are not being comprehensively served by the current branch structure.

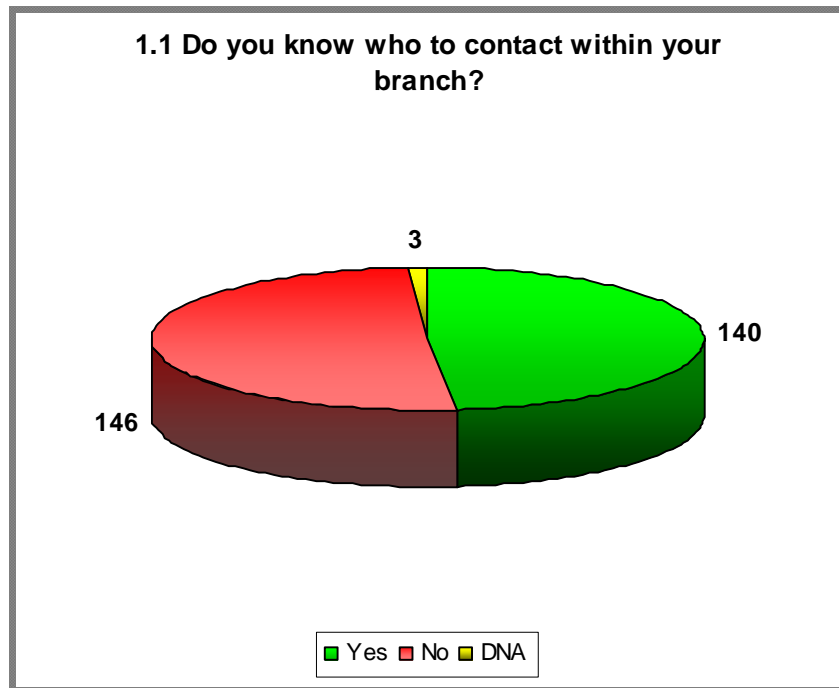


**Respondents who did not know their branch**



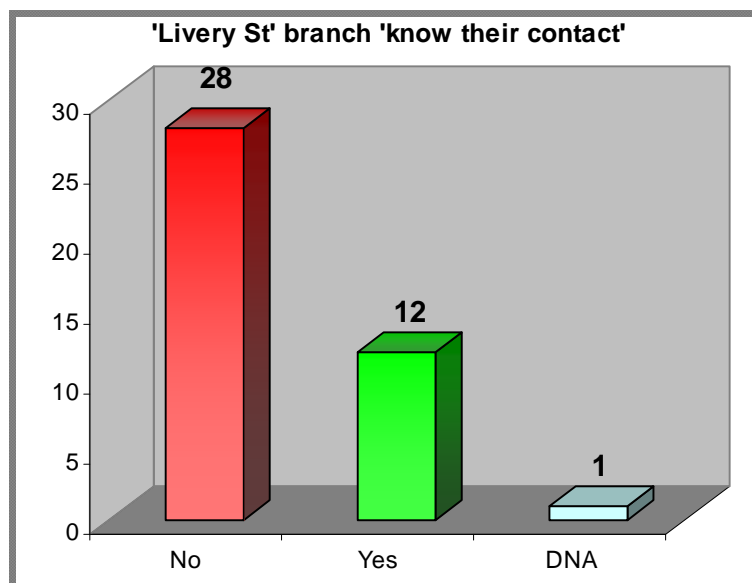
■ No ■ Livery St

**1.1 If you needed to contact UNISON for advice do you know who to contact within your branch?**

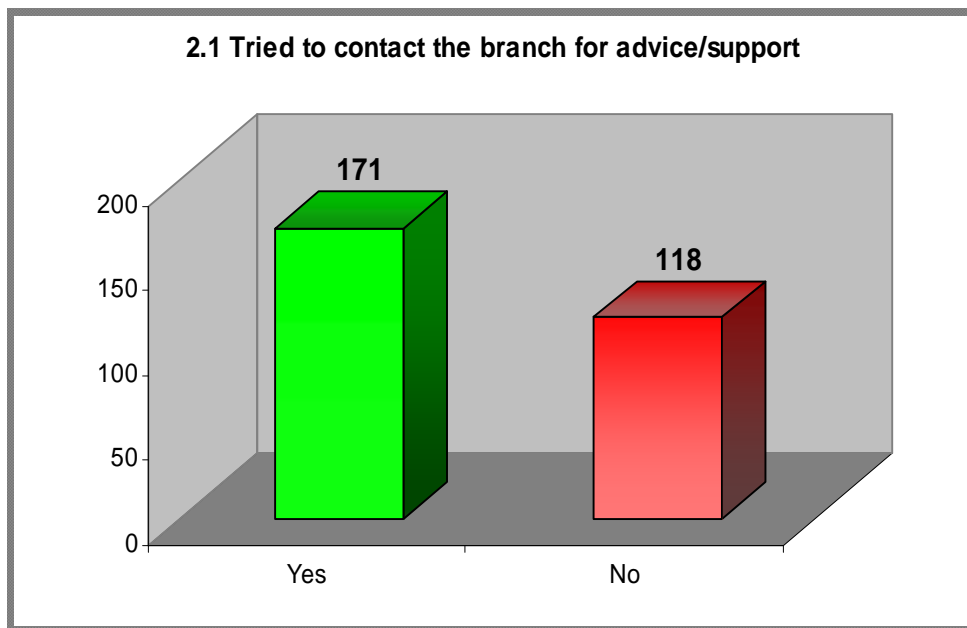


Around half of all respondents revealed that they did not know who to contact within their branch. This is of concern because it is critically important for members to know who their local rep and branch officers are if we are to have an effective branch structure and to avoid members bypassing this structure by contacting regional office in the first instance.

Interestingly, of the 41 who said Livery Street was their branch some 12 said they knew who their contact was.

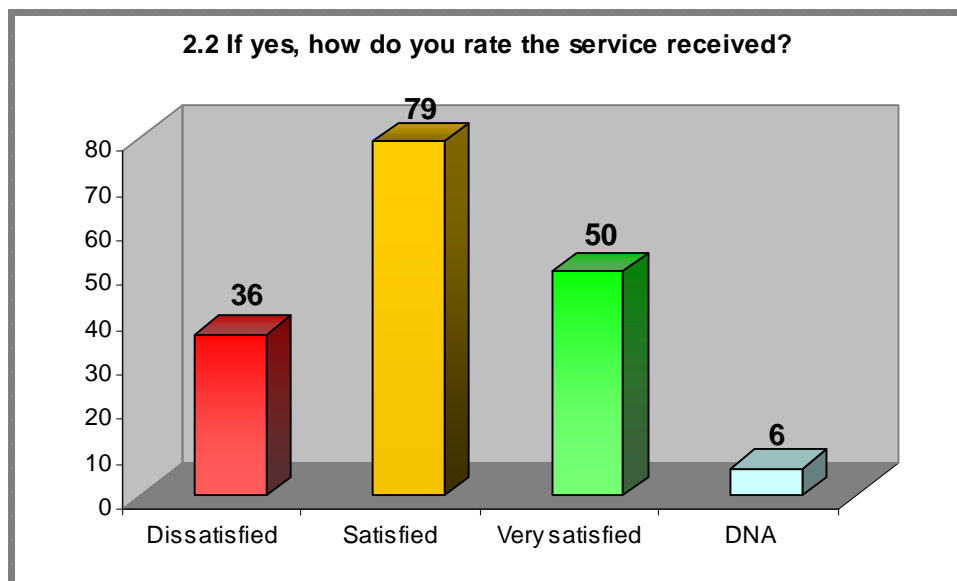


## 2.1 Have you ever tried to contact your branch for advice/support?



This response indicates that the majority of respondents had contacted the branch for advice.

## 2.2 If yes, how do you rate the service you received?

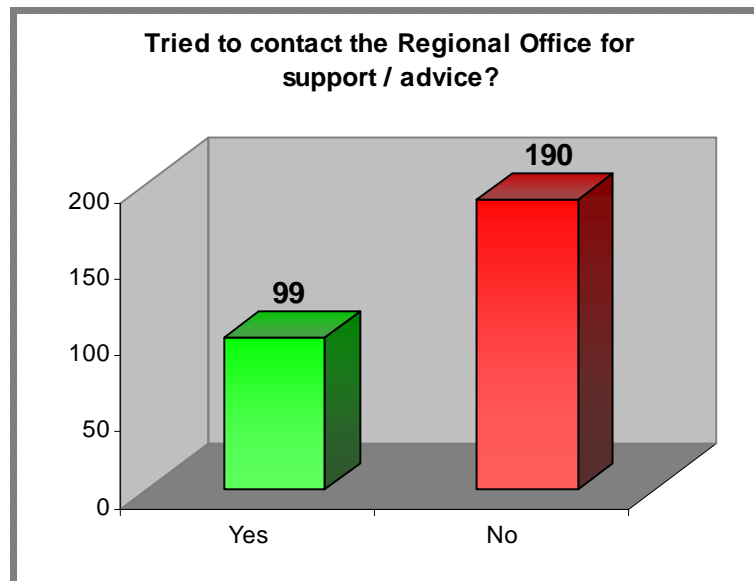


The response to this question highlights a mixed picture. The majority of respondents are either satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from their branch. Nonetheless, there is a sizeable minority of members who expressed dissatisfaction. Such results would suggest that there is room for improvement.

The questionnaire did not distinguish the nature of the contact between the branch and the member. This

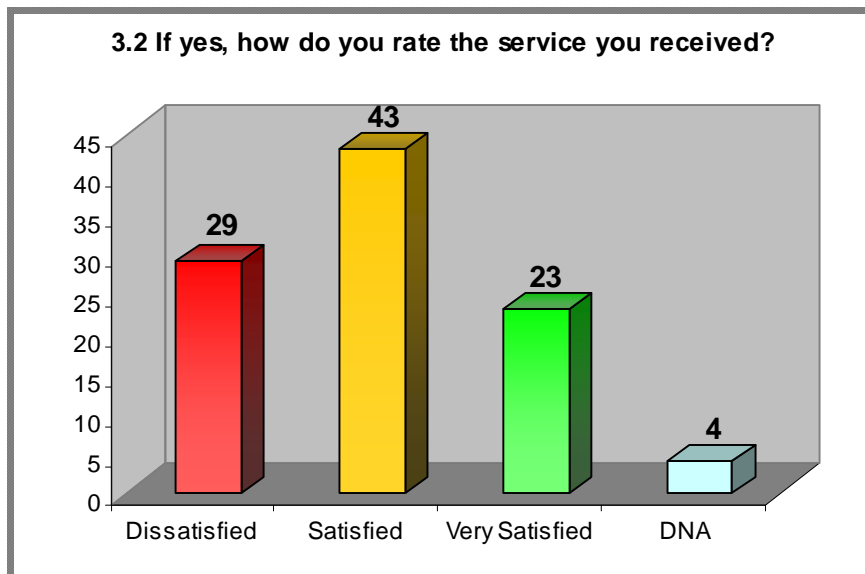
Of the 36 who were dissatisfied all, except one, were ordinary members

### 3.1 Have you ever tried to contact the Regional Office for advice/support?



34% of respondents stated that they had tried to contact the Regional Office for advice. This high figure supports anecdotal evidence from Organisers which suggests that the Regional Office is being called upon to offer direct advice or support to CVS members.

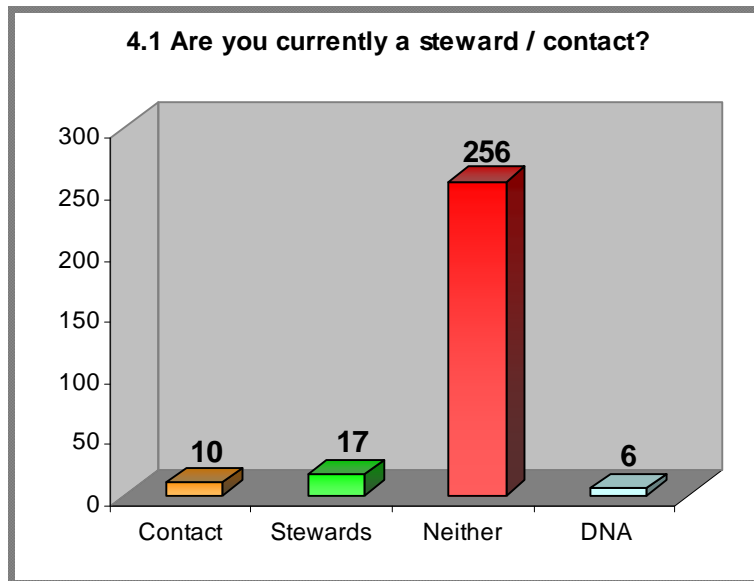
### 3.2 If yes, how do you rate the service you received?



Again, similarly to the responses provided to question 2.2, the response is mixed. The vast majority are satisfied or very satisfied. Given that the results above indicate that a large number of CVS referrals come to Region it is a disturbing trend if a third of those members are dissatisfied with the service on offer. This would suggest that both the present branch structure allied with Regional involvement is patchy and not providing a comprehensive service to members. This would indicate that a specialised CVS branch should aim to improve to the casework service on offer to members within this sector.

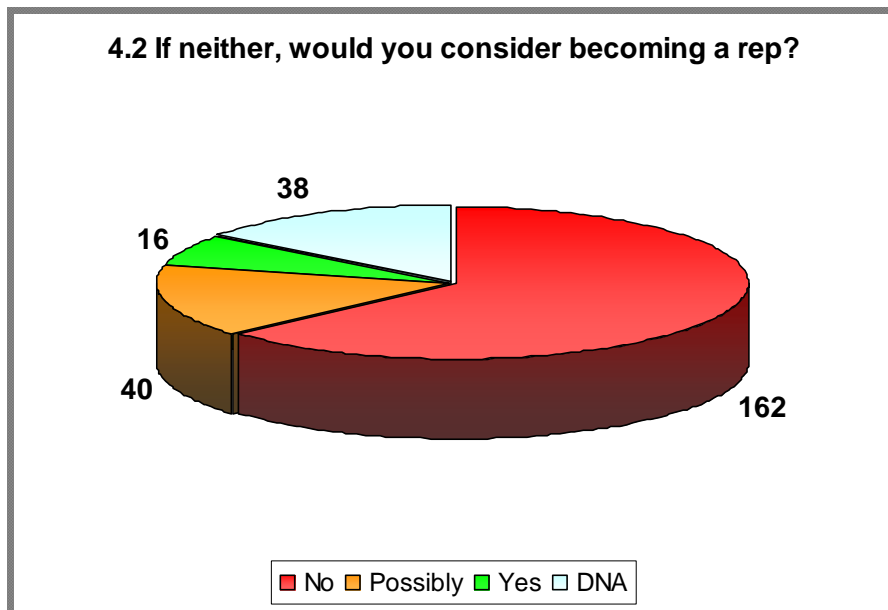
Of the 29 who were dissatisfied a total of 6 (21%) of these complaints were from existing stewards

#### 4.1 Are you currently a union steward or contact?



The survey demonstrated that the majority of responses came from ordinary members with 27 responses coming from stewards or contacts. As there are small numbers of stewards operating in this sector this is quite a high contact rate from

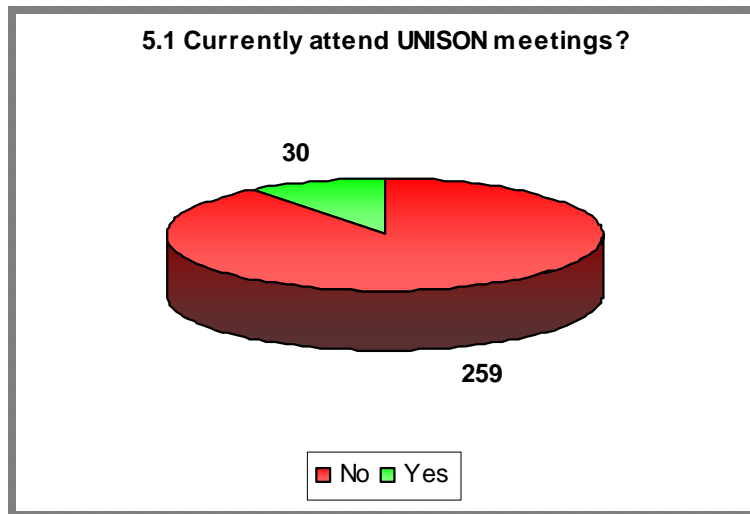
#### 4.2 If neither, would you consider becoming a representative?



This result was particularly encouraging as it identified a possible 56 members who have expressed a willingness to consider becoming more active by becoming a representative or contact. The survey has acted as a very useful organising tool in identifying a significant number of potential activists. This is of the utmost importance and should not be forgotten as we seek to grow the union.

The BCVS team is currently contacting all of the identified potential activists and will be conducting one to one and workplace meetings to seek to build upon this opportunity.

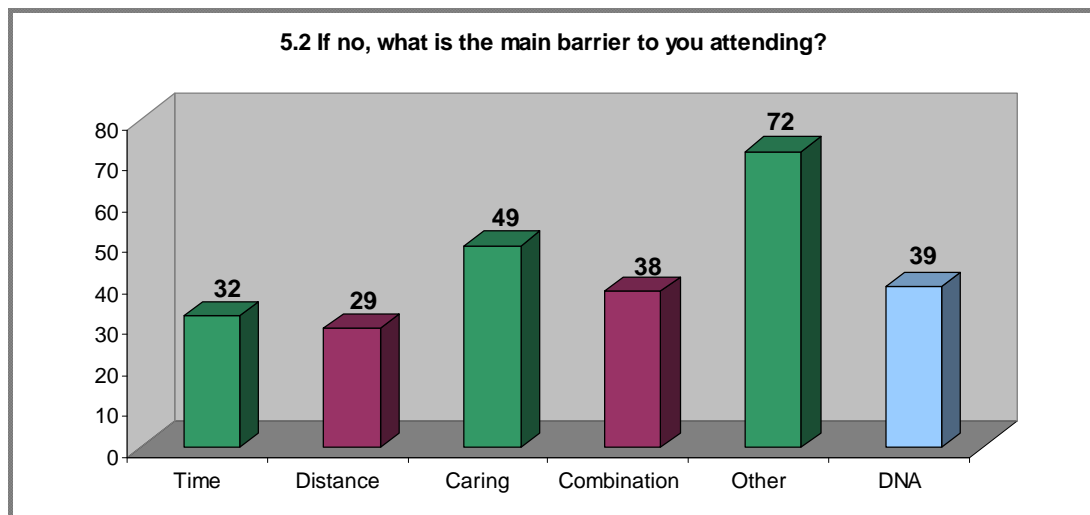
### 5.1 Do you currently attend any UNISON meetings?



The survey demonstrated that only 10% of members within the CVS sector presently attend UNISON meetings and participate in the decision making process of the union. As the CVS sector grows in importance it is imperative that we work to increase the number of CVS members attending UNISON meetings.

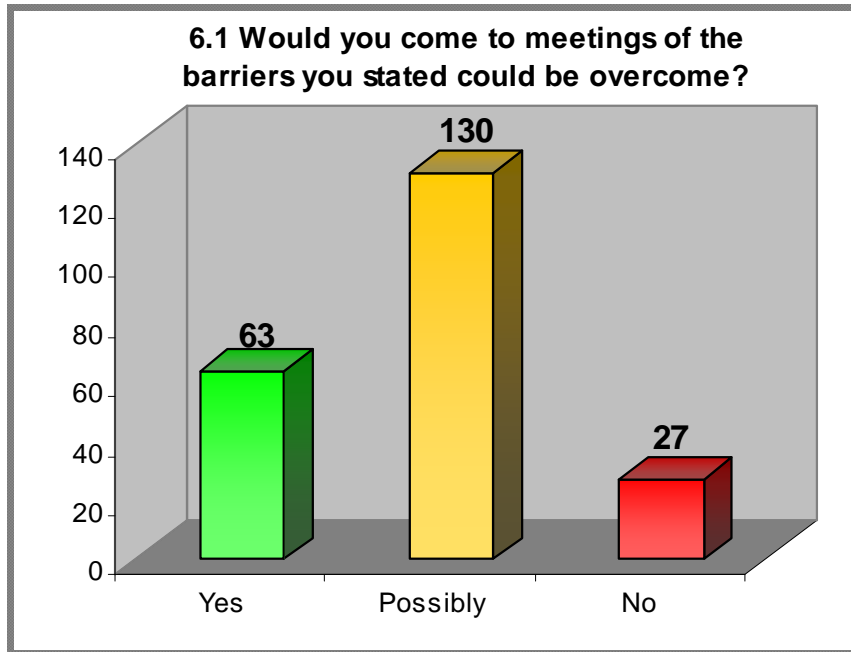
In addition, of the 30 who do attend UNISON meetings 60% (18) are already either a steward or contact (17 stewards, 1 contact).

### 5.2 If no, what is the main barrier to you attending?



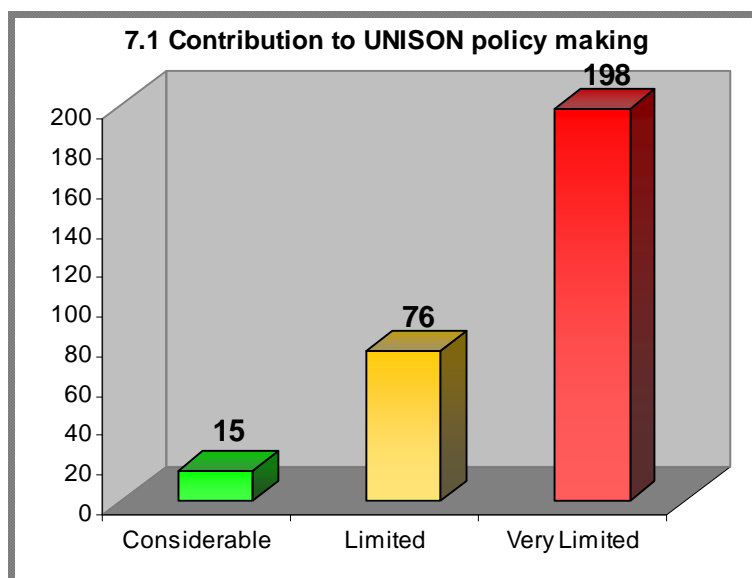
As this graph demonstrates there is not one clear issue that is acting as the main barrier for members attending UNISON meetings. Rather combinations of issues are restricting opportunities for members to contribute. This needs to be understood and taken into consideration when planning branch meetings.

### 6.1 Would you come to meetings if the barriers you have stated could be overcome?



The results to this question indicate that there is a desire amongst the membership to become more involved with 169 members stating that they would, or would at least consider, attending meetings if they were able to overcome their present difficulties in attending. Only 27 said they had no interest in attending. As a consequence, if taken in consideration with the possible new stewards and contacts there does appear a hunger amongst many CVS member to get more involved in the functioning of the union.

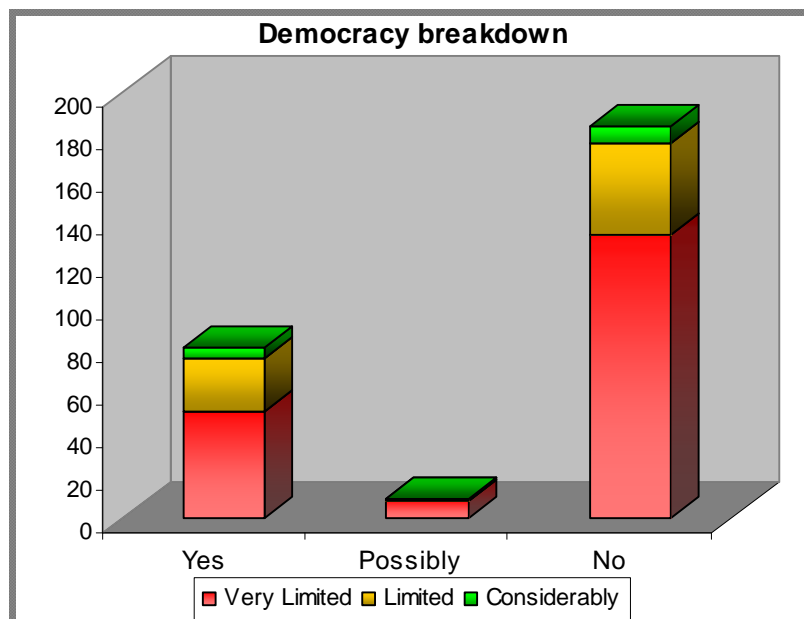
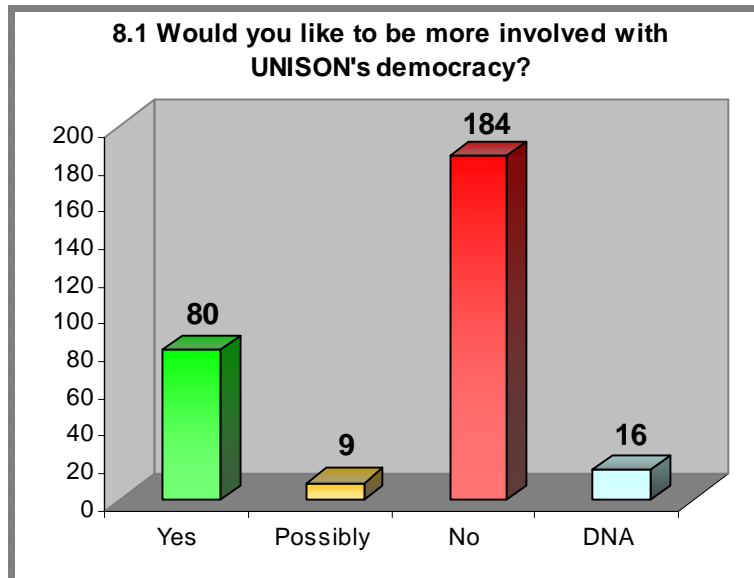
**7.1 What contribution do you currently make in determining UNISON's policies?**



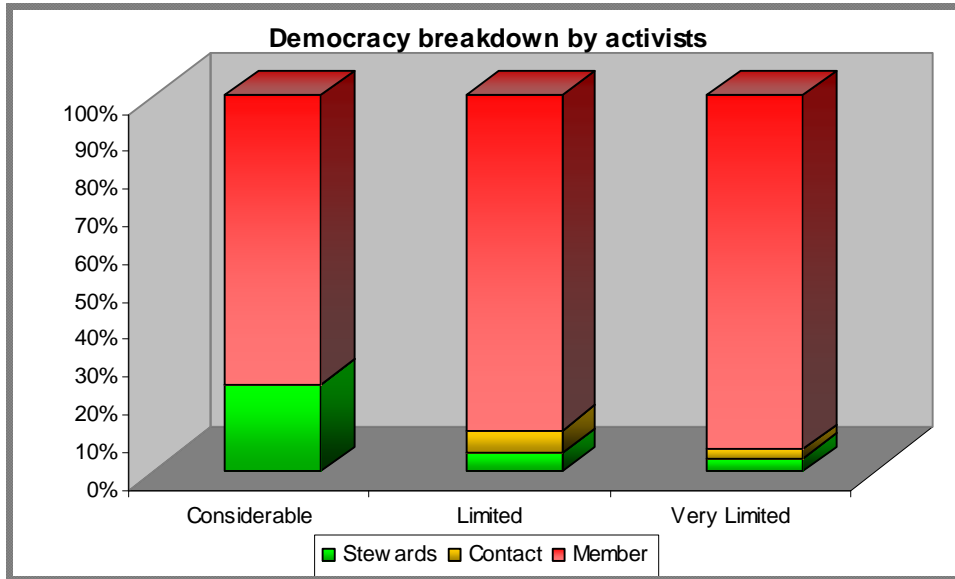
Yet again the response to this question reinforces the reality that the overwhelming majority of CVS members are, at present, simply not involved with the democratic policy making process within UNISON.

Only 3 stewards out of 17 feel they have considerable democratic engagement and none of the 10 contacts felt they had considerable engagement.

**8.1 Would you like to become more involved in the union's democracy?**



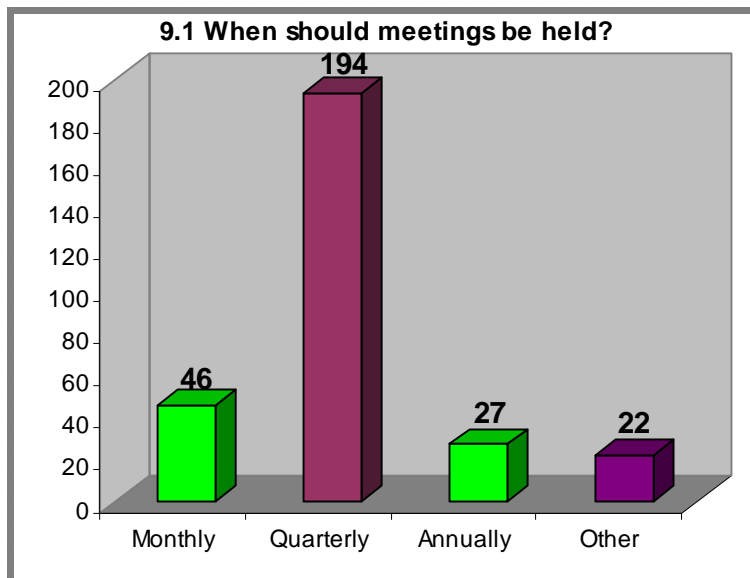
	Yes	Possibly	No
Very Limited	50	8	133
Limited	25	1	43
Considerable	5	0	8

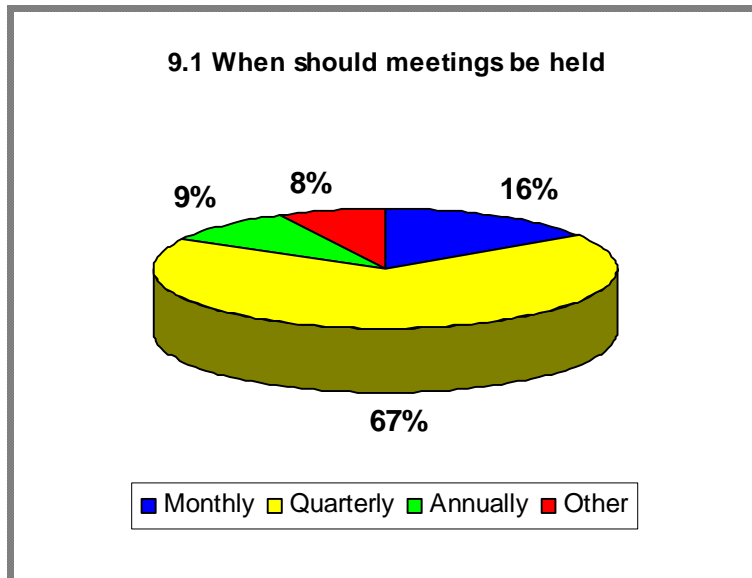


	Considerable	Limited	Very Limited
<b>Stewards</b>	3	4	7
<b>Contact</b>	0	5	5
<b>Member</b>	10	73	192

The process has identified a further 89 members who expressed a willingness to be more involved with the democracy of UNISON. Given the historical difficulty in trying to persuade members to use their right to become involved with the internal democracy this is encouraging.

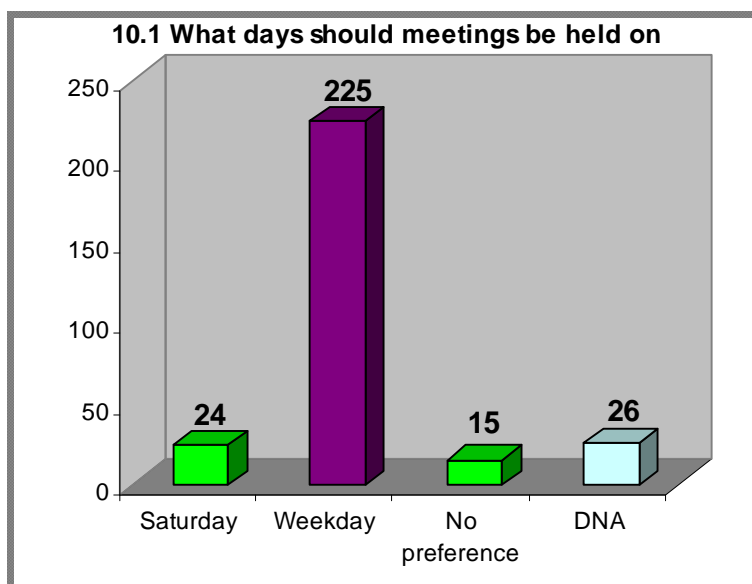
**9.1 If a Regional CVS branch was established, how often do you think meetings should be held?**





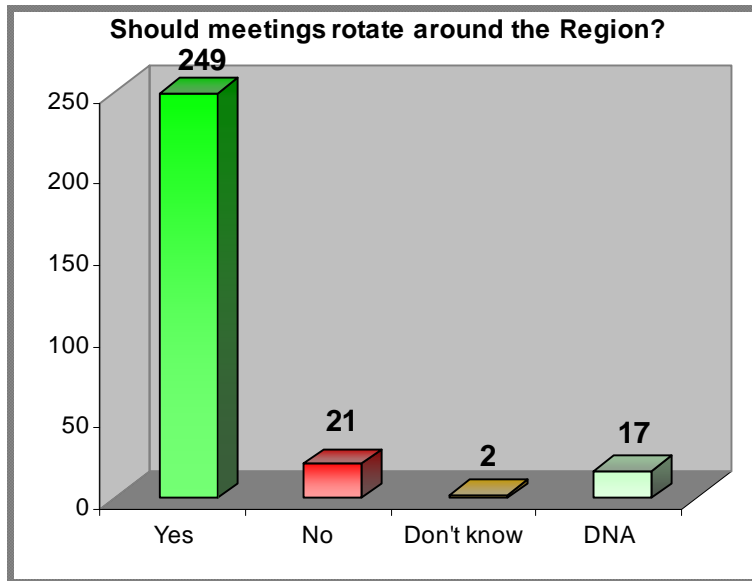
There is a clear majority supporting the proposal to hold quarterly meetings.

**10.1 When should meetings be held?**



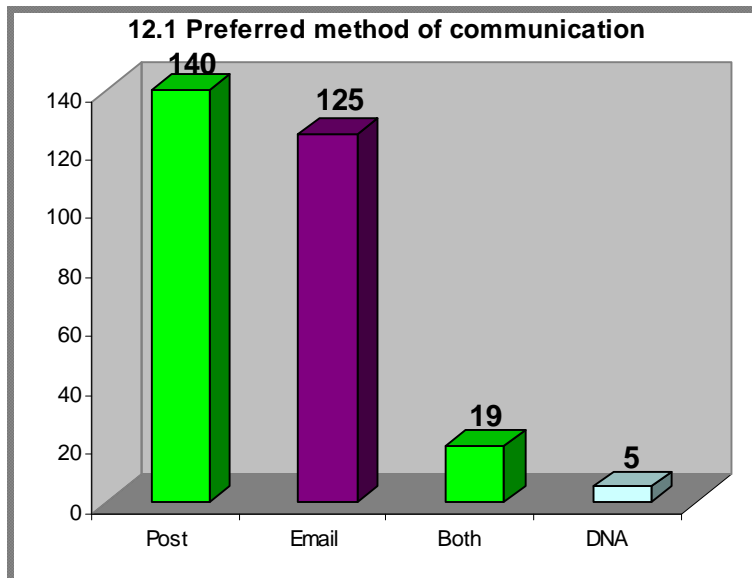
The survey results demonstrate that there is a strong preference for meetings to be conducted during the week as opposed to the weekend. However, opinion was divided as to whether the morning, afternoon or evening would be the most appropriate time for meetings.

### 11.1 Should meetings rotate around the Region?



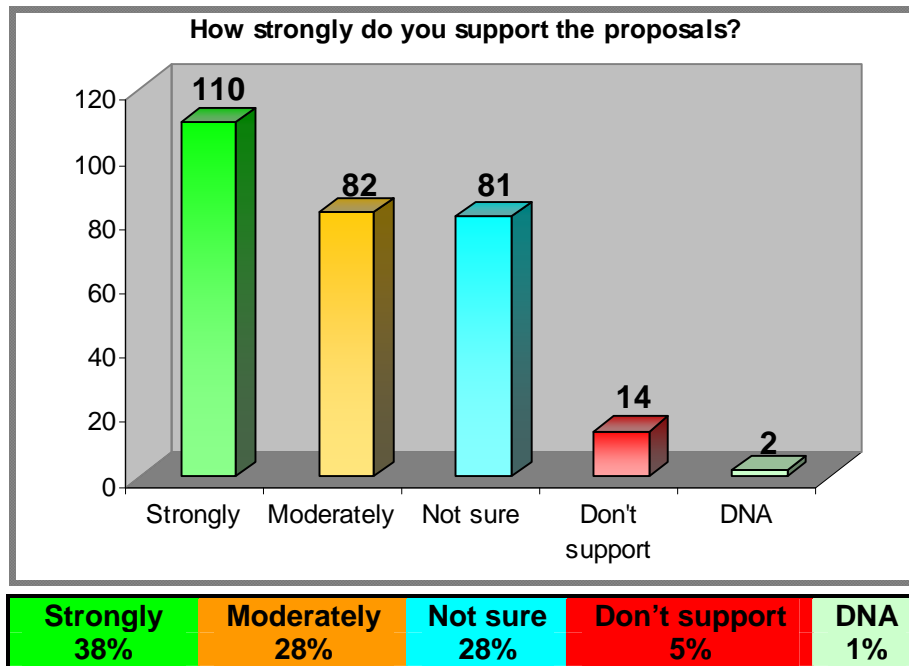
The results demonstrate a tremendous amount of support for the CVS branch to rotate meetings around the region.

### 12.1 Would you prefer communication to be via email, website or through the post?



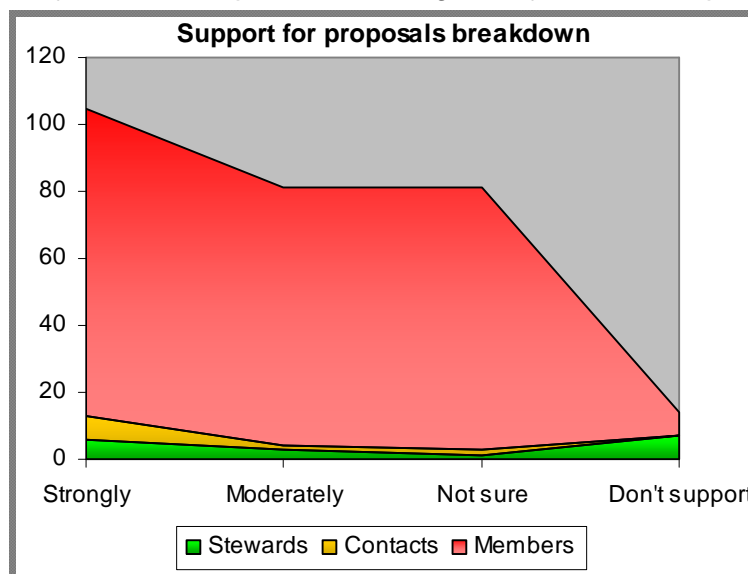
It is significant that the majority of members who responded still preferred postal communication. However, the high numbers who prefer email is encouraging for UNISON's green agenda and policies for economic efficiency. This is a trend that should be encouraged in order to reduce office overheads as well as freeing staff time. Therefore, in trying to move to an electronic communication system the branch must move cautiously and ensure that all members are catered for and that paper communication is continued for as long as members wish. .

**13.1 How strongly do you support the proposal to organise our CVS members in a Regional CVS branch?**



38% of respondents strongly support with a further 28% moderately supporting. However, it must be noted that 28% of respondents stated that they were 'not sure' which would suggest that members in the CVS sector will require further information about the project and the benefits of a dedicated CVS branch in order for all the membership to fully understand, and support, the proposals.

What can be stated for certain is that there is no widespread coherent opposition to the proposals. Rather there is significant support for the project allied with a need to provide further explanation and clarity for CVS members as we move forward towards the establishment of a fully functioning branch. Support for the CVS branch is significant with just 5% of respondents stating an objection to the proposals



	Strongly		Moderately		Not sure		Don't support	
	%	Value	%	Value	%	Value	%	Value
<b>Stewards</b>	35%	6	18%	3	0.1%	1	41%	7
<b>Contacts</b>	70%	7	10%	1	20%	2	0%	0
<b>Members</b>	36%	92	30%	77	31%	78	0.2%	7