

# Exploring citizen-led digital tools in Sheffield's political landscape: A case study of *WhoisMyCouncillor?*



**WHO IS MY  
COUNCILLOR.  
CO.UK**



# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

We found that local parties supported the aim of *WhoismyCouncillor?* and saw its potential for improving local democracy. However, they also raised important barriers and trade-offs they had to navigate when deciding whether to engage with the initiative.

In terms of citizens engaging with the site, our findings suggest that user patterns mirror existing differences in turnout and demographic inequalities across the city.

Taken together, our nine Key Findings help shed light on elements of the local political system and culture, and how and where citizen-led projects can fit in.

## Key Findings

### ***What do local parties think about the site?***

- Finding 1**     *WhoismyCouncillor?* is seen as good for local democracy
- Finding 2**     *WhoismyCouncillor?* has potential to support campaigns
- Finding 3**     Trust was crucial for engaging with the site
- Finding 4**     There are some worries that engaging with the site could pose risks
- Finding 5**     There were split feelings towards the survey questions
- Finding 6**     Time matters
- Finding 7**     Place matters

### ***Who uses the website?***

- Finding 8**     User patterns correspond with turnout, but not marginality of a ward
- Finding 9**     User patterns track demographic patterns across the city

These findings then inform five next steps for *WhoismyCouncillor?* and three directions for future research - these are detailed in Section 4: Conclusions and Next Steps.

As researchers we hope the details in this report are also useful for those interested in issues of democracy, politics, and citizen engagement in Sheffield.

# WhoismyCouncillor?

**64,041**  
**PAGE**  
**VIEWS**

12th April 2020 to date

## Candidates 2022

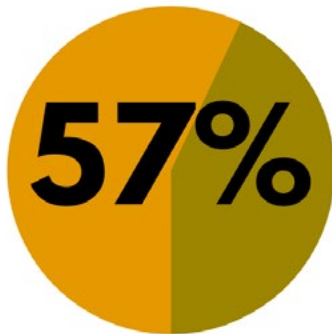
Total candidates: **138**

'Active'\* candidates: **51**

\*candidates either:

- Standing in marginal wards
- With high online activity

Candidates with completed surveys: **62**



Of wards had a higher number of page views than the winning margin in 2021



15 out of 28 candidates elected completed the survey **54%** 2022

## Press and Media

WhoismyCouncillor? Had press coverage from:

- The Sheffield Telegraph
- The Sheffield Star
- Now Then Magazine
- The Yorkshire Post
- Sheffield Tribune
- BBC Radio Sheffield
- Sheffield Live
- ShefLive

**80%**

new candidates elected (non-incumbents) completed the survey

**43%**

of surveys were completed in both 2022 & 2023

All parties standing for election engaged with the initiative (except UKIP)



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# Foreword

Run by local citizens, *WhoismyCouncillor?* is an initiative that asks councillors and candidates questions about themselves and their priorities. It is independent of any political party and aims to give Sheffielders a better idea of who wants to represent the people of Sheffield on the City Council. As *WhoismyCouncillor?* put it: “Any improvement which strengthens the representation of citizens and tackles inequalities is a good thing. We believe information is important for increasing voter engagement, critical thinking and meaningful interaction with our democratic system.” Finding this information previously wasn’t easy: most of it wasn’t available, and what was available was scattered about.

It takes a lot of work to create a resource like this. The website needs designing, questions for candidates thought up, the survey sent out, information uploaded, results added and updated, the site promoted to raise awareness. And much more. A small team of volunteers did this in 2021 and 2022 with no funding, dedicating huge amounts of their time.

One volunteer - Eleanor, a student at the University of Sheffield - introduced me to *WhoismyCouncillor?*. I’d been researching how citizen-led initiatives were using digital technology in UK General Elections, and here was an example of exactly this at the local level. Eleanor had a lot of critical questions - how well did *WhoismyCouncillor?* actually work? How could it work better? How could it keep going for future local elections when everyone was a volunteer? In the pressure of running the initiative for two years, it was difficult for those involved to step back and find time to begin addressing these issues.

We put together a research proposal and received funds from my department to employ Eleanor as a researcher for a month; she had to tread a difficult line, being someone who established and helps run *WhoismyCouncillor?* and then a researcher picking it apart. In my opinion she juggled these roles superbly.

Our aim was to explore how this sort of initiative fits into Sheffield’s political landscape. In the short time we had we focused on two questions:

1. What do local parties think about *WhoismyCouncillor?* To answer this we interviewed candidates and election organisers from the four main parties in Sheffield
2. Who uses the website? To answer this we analysed website user data and linked it to information about each ward in the city

The key findings are in the Executive Summary. The overall hope is that conducting this analysis, sharing the findings, and outlining next steps, shows that *WhoismyCouncillor?* is serious about being the best resource it can be for both Sheffield citizens and local parties. Finally, we’re extremely grateful for the engagement of local political parties in the research - it would not have worked without that - and the funds provided by the Department of Geography.

**Luke Temple - Lecturer in Political Geography  
Department of Geography - University of Sheffield**

Section 1

**A little bit of context...**



## What are Local Elections?

There are 28 wards in Sheffield, and each one is represented by three councillors who sit on the City Council for a four year term. Elections occur in thirds: one councillor is elected in three out of four years, with no election in the fourth year. The City Council is responsible for decision-making on aspects of education, roads, transport, social care, housing, libraries, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste, planning, and council tax. Councillors approve a budget for the city, attend committees and vote on priorities and policies, and support residents and organisations in their ward.<sup>1</sup>

Voter turnout in local elections tends to be low. The average turnout across Sheffield in 2021 was 35% of eligible voters<sup>2</sup>, just slightly lower than the national turnout of 36%.<sup>3</sup> Research has found a strong correlation between being able to identify local councillors and going out to vote. For instance, a recent study in the US found that having less information about candidates is linked to a lower likelihood to vote.<sup>4</sup> Work in the UK found that candidates who are active locally tend to turn out more voters for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

## What is WhoismyCouncillor?

*WhoismyCouncillor?* is a citizen-led initiative that has run in 2021 and 2022. It is independent of political parties. It seeks to improve the information available to citizens about their local councillors and candidates, especially in the run up to an election. In their words: *“Any improvement which strengthens the representation of citizens and tackles inequalities is a good thing. We believe information is important for increasing voter engagement, critical thinking and meaningful interaction with our democratic system.”*

To do this the volunteer team sent a survey to every candidate standing for election. The first part asked four compulsory and open questions:

- Tell us a little bit about yourself
- What do you think makes a good local councillor?
- Tell us three things you’re aiming to focus on or achieve for your ward
- Tell us three things you’re aiming to focus on or achieve for the city of Sheffield

The second part asked four optional questions updated each year by the volunteer team. They were around key debates in national policy or potential decisions to be made by the council, such as institutional racism, public

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<sup>1</sup> Voting Counts provide a helpful summary of Local Elections: [votingcounts.org.uk/local-elections](https://votingcounts.org.uk/local-elections) and a more detailed discussion is available from the Institute for Government: [instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/local-government](https://instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/local-government)

<sup>2</sup> See [sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/city-council-parish-council-election-results](https://sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/city-council-parish-council-election-results)

<sup>3</sup> Rallings and Thrasher (2021) *Local Elections Handbook 2021*

<sup>4</sup> Lamb and Perry (2020) ‘Knowing What You Don’t Know’

<sup>5</sup> Miller (1988) *Irrelevant Elections?*

transport, and landlord licensing. The respondent could answer the extent to which they agree with a statement and had the opportunity to explain their answer. This information is then made available on [WhoismyCouncillor.co.uk](http://WhoismyCouncillor.co.uk) which can be searched via party, postcode, or ward. The site is also updated to reflect which candidates were voted in.

## Democracy in Sheffield

For the past five decades the council has primarily been controlled by Labour, including from 1969 through to 1999. The Council has since moved between Labour control (2003-07, 2011-21), no overall control (2002-03, 2007-08, 2021-present) and Liberal Democrat control (1999-2002, 2008-10). This pattern of Labour support is historically tied to the city's identity and political culture (whether positively or negatively).<sup>6</sup>

In recent years there have been political developments in the city worth mentioning. The Sheffield Tree Action Group campaign brought widespread attention to the City Council; and the It's Our City campaign fought to hold a referendum in 2021 which passed 65-35% on a public vote and has led to a new council committee system. Our interviewees talked of the trust now needed between parties under the new system.

This was the context into which the *WhoismyCouncillor?* project was born in March 2021. Though not linked to any other group related to democracy or elections at that time, it felt like the right time to try and introduce a way to increase political engagement - a time which one of our interviewees described as "for the city of Sheffield, that was definitely a moment."

## Voting and Differences across Sheffield

There are stark inequalities in Sheffield across a number of demographic measures: for example, life expectancy for women falls by 10 years from one end of the 83 bus route to another.<sup>7</sup> Lots of demographic factors have been linked to voting; those more likely to vote tend to be older, wealthier, have higher levels of knowledge of and interest in politics and feel more attached to their local area.<sup>8</sup> In Section 3 we look in more detail at some of these demographic factors in relation to use of *WhoismyCouncillor?*.

These demographics vary between places and so also play a role in the long-term patterns of results across Sheffield.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Payling (2014) 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire'

<sup>7</sup> See <https://fairnessonthe83.nowthenmagazine.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Rallings and Thrasher (1997) *Local Elections in Britain*

<sup>9</sup> See maps at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield\\_City\\_Council\\_elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield_City_Council_elections)

## Marginality and Paper Candidates

Long-term patterns like these therefore have an impact on political campaigning. Marginality is a measure of how competitive an area is. The result in a marginal ward could go a number of ways; in contrast, a safe ward is one where there is a history of big majorities for the same party.

Because of this, it is common practice for parties to put forward 'paper candidates' in certain areas. These are candidates who have essentially no chance of winning in that area, however, the party wants to be on the ballot sheet so local citizens have the opportunity to vote for them. In these wards little campaigning is done: time and resources are directed towards more competitive wards.

In 2022 *WhoismyCouncillor* estimated just over 60% of candidates put forward were paper candidates. This proportion varies between parties.

## Party organisation and campaigning

We should point out that political parties organise and campaign in very different ways. Some are organised at ward-level, whilst others are very centrally managed. All parties prioritised traditional campaigning such as door-knocking and leafleting. They valued building an online and social media presence to different degrees. They all described digital campaigning increasing due to COVID-19.

**This context impacts the way parties engage with citizen initiatives such as *WhoismyCouncillor*?. The first question in our report was to ask about these issues, and find out how the initiative is understood to fit into Sheffield's political landscape.**

## Section 2

# What do local parties think about *WhoismyCouncillor?*

Overall, our interviewees supported the general aim of *WhoismyCouncillor?*. They also raised important potential barriers and trade-offs made when getting involved. These shed light on elements of the local political system and culture, and how and where citizen-led projects can fit in (or face difficulties). Below we detail these findings.

We spoke to those in the local parties with experience of *WhoismyCouncillor?*. We targeted those with broad overviews of their party's campaign and spoke to both those who had been supportive and those who had reservations. We secured interviews with campaign coordinators (or equivalent) from four parties - Labour, Greens, Liberal Democrats, and the Conservative Party. We prioritised these four parties because we didn't have time to speak to every party, and they run the most active campaigns in the city. We also interviewed two councillors. The report anonymises the comments of all those who spoke to us and interviewees were given the option to comment on the draft report.

We should stress that our interviewees are not guaranteed to be representative of their party. However, we think we have identified the key viewpoints across our discussions.

### **Finding 1: *WhoismyCouncillor?* is seen as good for local democracy**

There was widespread support for the principles associated with *WhoismyCouncillor?*. Four interviewees took part in the initiative partly due to judging it as a tool for public engagement with local politics. One specifically engaged because of seeing its objective as improving local democracy. Another thought it particularly important that the electorate have access to candidates and knowledge about their values and intentions, in order to have a choice in elections. For another it was, "*an accountability thing, almost like a hustings*", which they saw as important for politicians.

Our interviewees mentioned encountering both lack of understanding of the democratic process and disinterest in politics on the doorstep. One interviewee referred to the idea that people may not believe that local government affects their lives. Another voiced that reduced understanding is compounded by issues of trust:

*"They don't trust the process, they don't trust things coming from councils, government ..."*

Because of this the initiative was welcomed overall. However, there were tensions and barriers to involvement, which we discuss in the following findings.

### **Finding 2: *WhoismyCouncillor?* has potential to support campaigns**

Digital elements of campaigning were described as having grown rapidly in the past decade, with a reliance on social media particularly during the COVID-19

lockdowns. All the interviewees engaged with the site due to its perceived contribution to electoral strategy, but expressed doubts it could swing a result. Many felt the site could be better promoted. It was seen by one interviewee as more important in wards where engagement with local politics is higher: *“I think in wards like that [...] I wouldn’t say it’d swing a ward one way or another, but it definitely would have an effect.”*

There was a recurring belief that in local elections voters give more value to the individual candidate than they do in general elections. Whilst the existence of tribal politics and political disaffection was acknowledged, many interviewees felt strongly that knowing a candidate cares about local issues can cut through both barriers to turnout and traditional party voting. For some this was a relatively recent phenomenon in Sheffield:

*“...[on traditional party voting] that’s gone out of the window since Brexit basically, that’s broken. And so it is important that people know the person and know their story.”*

Accordingly, it was considered a useful platform for communicating who these individual candidates are and their intentions for the ward. It was suggested that messages get across better on social media if they come from individuals, with a personal touch, rather than from party accounts.

### **Finding 3: Trust was crucial for engaging with the site**

A barrier to engagement was an initial lack of trust in *WhoismyCouncillor?*. However, this varied across and within parties. It was clear that, for some, already knowing those involved in the initiative helped to overcome initial hesitations or concerns. Talking to campaign coordinators was also helpful, but as parties are organised in different ways there remained issues of trust for certain candidates. As one interviewee described, their party *“rumour mill”* had (erroneously) linked *WhoismyCouncillor?* to the It’s Our City campaign. As a result of this, positions on the referendum influenced levels of distrust of the project.

Some feared the site was a cover for another party. Trust issues stemming from suspicion of political bias are slightly more complex. For one interviewee this caused a moment of worry that engaging with the site would then cause their colleagues and fellow party members to distrust them. As to ideological positioning, different parties felt the site favoured or hindered them in different ways. One interviewee seemed most trusting of the site when they felt it helped raise issues that their party was supportive of, whilst another felt more trusting when they were sure the site was apolitical.

#### **Finding 4: There are some worries that engaging with the site could pose risks**

Firstly, image control is important to parties and three interviewees worried about the content of what was being put online. One mentioned a temptation to “play it safe” with answers and also raised issues about whether campaign coordinators would need to vet candidate answers. There was a further concern around making ‘pledges’, in writing, online. They felt pledges can be unfeasible later due to rapidly changing events. One interviewee was apprehensive of backlash from within their party if a seat were lost due to a statement made online.

Secondly, some interviewees feared negative optics of candidates not completing the survey when other parties had. This was also thought to potentially upset paper candidates, feeling pressure to complete the survey for the sake of the wider party. One interviewee explained how, pre-internet, paper candidates would essentially do the party a favour by appearing on a ballot they could not win, remaining anonymous to most of Sheffield. However, now, details of people can be found far more easily online.

Another interviewee was concerned about abuse of or risk to their party’s candidates, based on historical incidents both on and offline. The *WhoismyCouncillor?* site itself does not have an option to comment or post.

#### **Finding 5: There were split feelings towards the survey questions**

Some interviewees couldn’t remember the specific survey questions, but commented more generally.

Most interviewees thought the question related to local issues in the ward was the most important. This was linked back to the belief that the electorate vote differently in local elections compared to national, with more importance given to the individual councillor’s action in the ward than the party they were from (see Finding 2). The difference between wards was stressed, with candidates needing to speak to different demographics and issues. One interviewee mentioned, however, this could be difficult for paper candidates with limited knowledge of the ward.

A councillor talked positively about the inclusion of questions which weren’t about the “*everyday stuff: roads, crossings, dog poo bins*”, because they felt that all parties would say basically the same thing on these issues. Therefore, the more probing topical questions were “*a good way to compare candidates across different party lines*”. They were concerned that local elections could get tedious for the public, and so enjoyed the challenge of needing to answer “*incisive political questions*” and in fact found the survey a useful exercise:



*“...having the chance to put a view down on those for the public record I thought was really valuable, I enjoyed that. I enjoyed having to distil my own thoughts into those answers.”*

Two interviewees noted that the questions were on topics which they/their party were interested in, but one went on to express concern that there weren't topics from the centre-right of the political spectrum. However, interviewees had considered the argument that including questions designed 'for' a particular party could put off other parties. One interviewee suggested asking questions on commonalities across manifestos, as an approach to making them attractive issues for all parties to complete. Three of the interviewees noted the difficulty between the site getting meaningful information and candidates needing to toe the 'party line'.

Similarly, one interviewee recognised the negotiation between giving throw-away answers or spending a large amount of time on responses:

*“Filling in a lengthy questionnaire [...] is an issue for some of them [candidates], but I think there's a trade-off there because if you cut it down to just simple questions then you're not going to get as detailed a picture of each candidate.”*

### **Finding 6: Time matters**

Interviewees frequently highlighted trade-offs when it came to deciding whether or not to get involved with *WhoismyCouncillor?*. Underpinning this was the difficulty of having such limited time during the 'hot' election campaign; indeed, one interviewee mentioned time pressure 13 times during our chat. The degree of emphasis varied across interviewees; for the more centralised campaigns the responsibility of organising responses fell to one person whilst this was less of a concern for the other parties. One interviewee, in fact, thought it could save time for central organisers, as emails asking about candidates could be directed to the site.

There was some discussion of a strategic predicament: active candidates have little time to complete the survey, whilst paper candidates might have the time but not always the motive.

All interviewees mentioned that they wished to be contacted earlier, though one recognised that this was difficult when candidate selection was often not confirmed until close to the election.

### **Finding 7: Place matters**

Running through these conversations was the idea that 'place matters'.<sup>10</sup> The distinctiveness of each ward, and how candidates and councillors respond to

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<sup>10</sup> See Johnston and Pattie (2006) *Putting Voters in their Place*

that, was mentioned across most of the above findings.

As a democratic principle, interviewees thought it important that citizens can find out where their candidate stands on local problems. As part of electoral campaigns, interviewees stressed that candidates being able to communicate the above was crucial. Issues differ very much across different wards. As an example, in the 2021 survey responses for Beighton there was an emphasis on the Owlthorpe Fields development around which there was a local campaign. One interviewee said that you can see voting in response to contentious issues like this show up in results right down to specific polling stations within a ward.

As mentioned above, time constraints differ across wards. And this links into varying campaign strategies across places: more party resources are allocated to certain wards with small majorities. Further differences across wards include political engagement, deprivation, and digital exclusion. These differences impact party strategy and are reflected in the user data of *WhoismyCouncillor?* across the 28 wards in Sheffield; the next section of this report explores how place matters for citizen engagement.

Section 3

**Who uses the site?**

Without a survey it's impossible to answer this question directly, but *WhoismyCouncillor?* collects page view data using Google Analytics which allows us to search for patterns. Although a user can look up the parties, the site is primarily based on wards, by clicking where you live or entering a postcode. This means we can explore links between the page views for wards in 2022 and data about that ward. We use rates of deprivation, digital exclusion and qualifications, local election majorities from 2021, and turnout from 2022.

Before we discuss our findings, there are two important caveats to flag up:

### **Caveat 1:**

Just because a user has clicked on a ward, or used a postcode, does not mean they actually live there. It is perfectly feasible that someone interested in politics across Sheffield looks at multiple wards. Therefore, we have to work with what we think is a fair assumption that most people look up where they live.

### **Caveat 2:**

Patterns we find between page views and ward data cannot be directly linked to individuals. We simply don't have that data. For instance, let's say we found higher page views in areas where there are more people who identify as Jedi. We cannot say for certain that it is those Jedi who are looking at the site; we can provide a reason why we think it might be, but this sort of data cannot confirm it.

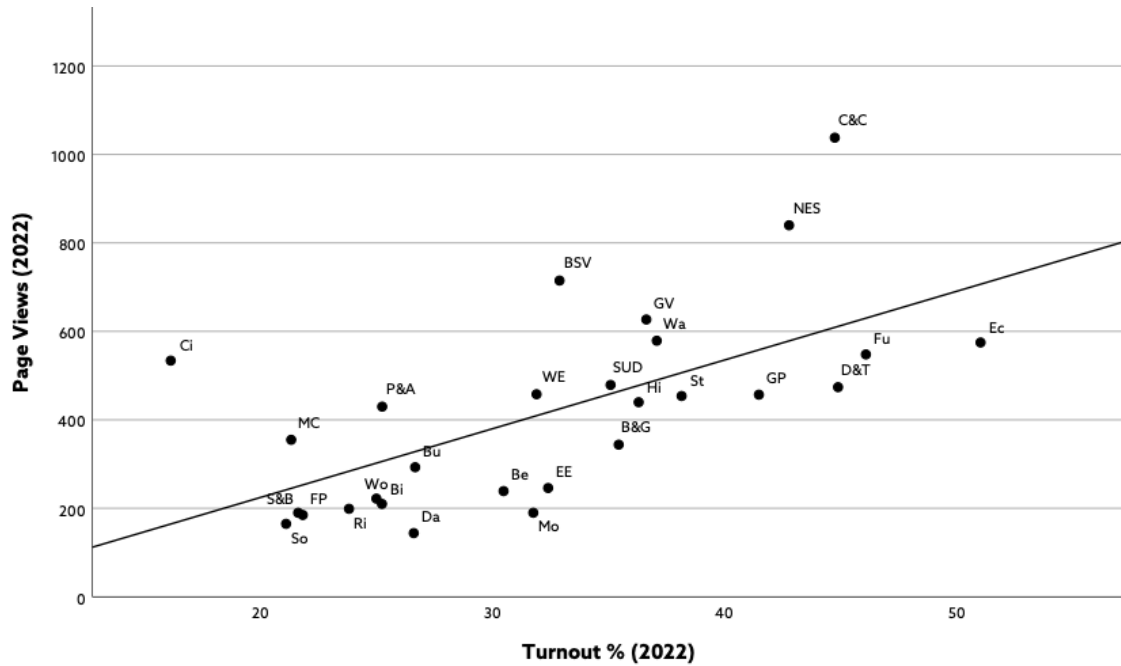
These are important caveats to keep in mind, but they don't stop us exploring the data. The key thing is that we are looking at and exploring 'the big picture' with this data, and this is how our two findings should be understood. Such analysis can help point towards patterns that have been found in other research and we can begin to explore why these patterns exist in Sheffield and consider further steps to confirm them. Further details on data, reading the graphs, and the statistical analysis are in the Methods Appendix.

Beauchief and Greenhill	B&G	Graves Park	GP
Beighton	Be	Hillsborough	Hi
Birley	Bi	Manor Castle	MC
Broomhill and Sharrow Vale	BSV	Mosborough	Mo
Burngreave	Bu	Nether Edge and Sharrow	NES
City	Ci	Park and Arbourthorne	P&A
Crookes and Crosspool	C&C	Richmond	Ri
Darnall	Da	Shiregreen and Brightside	S&B
Dore and Totley	D&T	Southey	So
East Ecclesfield	EE	Stannington	St
Ecclesall	Ec	Stocksbridge and Upper Don	SUD
Firth Park	FP	Walkley	Wa
Fulwood	Fu	West Ecclesfield	WE
Gleadless Valley	GV	Woodhouse	Wo

## Finding 8: User patterns correspond with turnout, but not the marginality of a ward

### Page Views and Turnout

Turnout is the % of registered voters who voted in 2022.

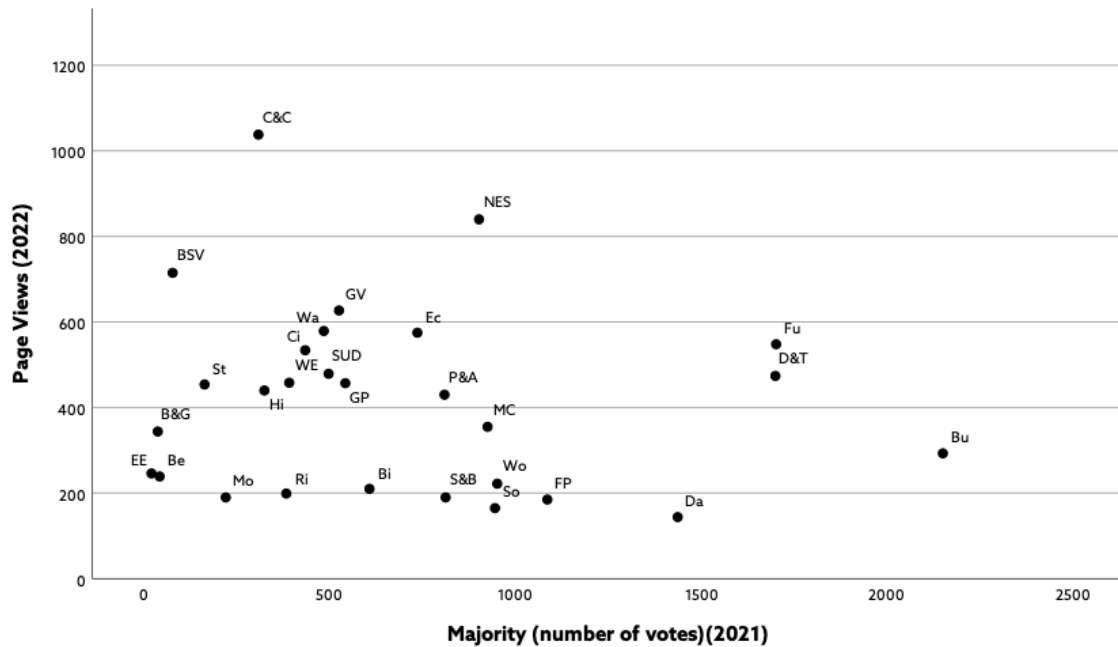


Pearson's Correlation = 0.636

Our results suggest that the number of page views and % turnout have a positive association. Using the website can be considered an indicator of political engagement, so this result is unsurprising; in places where people are engaging more by going out to vote there is also higher usage of *WhoismyCouncillor?*.

## Page Views and Marginality

The closer the result, the more marginal a ward is. We measure this using the size of the majority between 1st and 2nd place from the 2021 local election result.



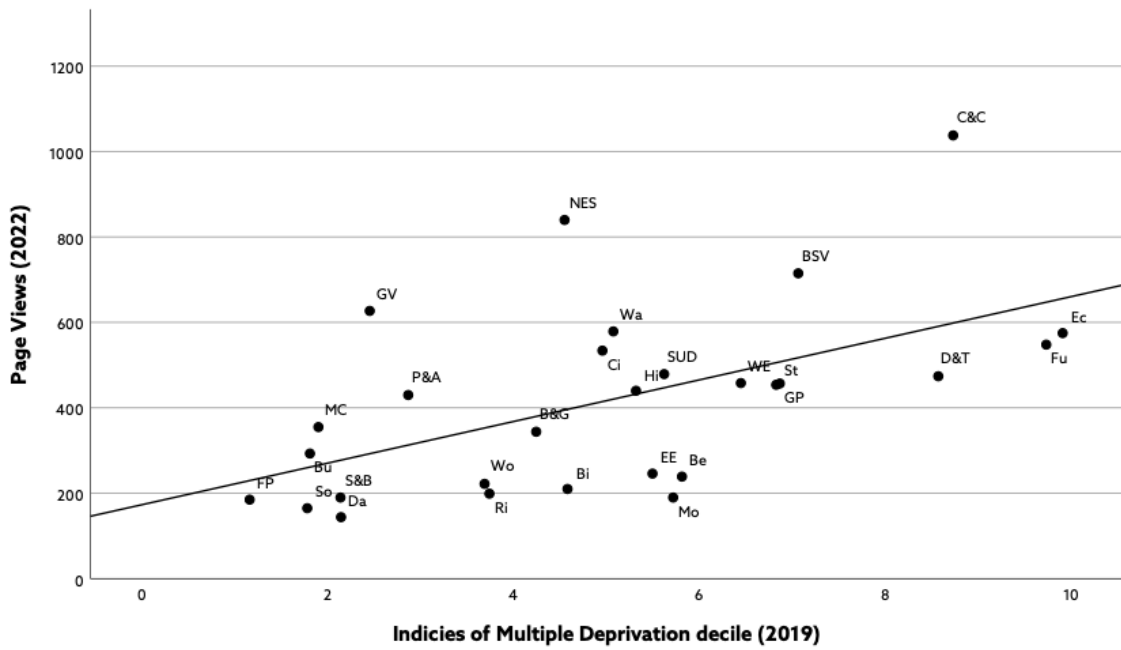
Pearson's Correlation = -0.141 (No correlation)

Marginality of seats has been cited as a possible driver of increased political activity, the logic being that when a result is close one vote could influence the result. However, we found no correlation between marginality and page views. The low engagement with local elections overall may explain this result: citizens have to know the seat is marginal to feel an increased need to vote. Therefore, it is worth reflecting that whilst a marginal seat will be a key focus for political parties, this might not be reflected in citizen engagement with other political resources, or even at the ballot box.

## Finding 9: User patterns track demographic patterns across the city

### Page Views and Deprivation

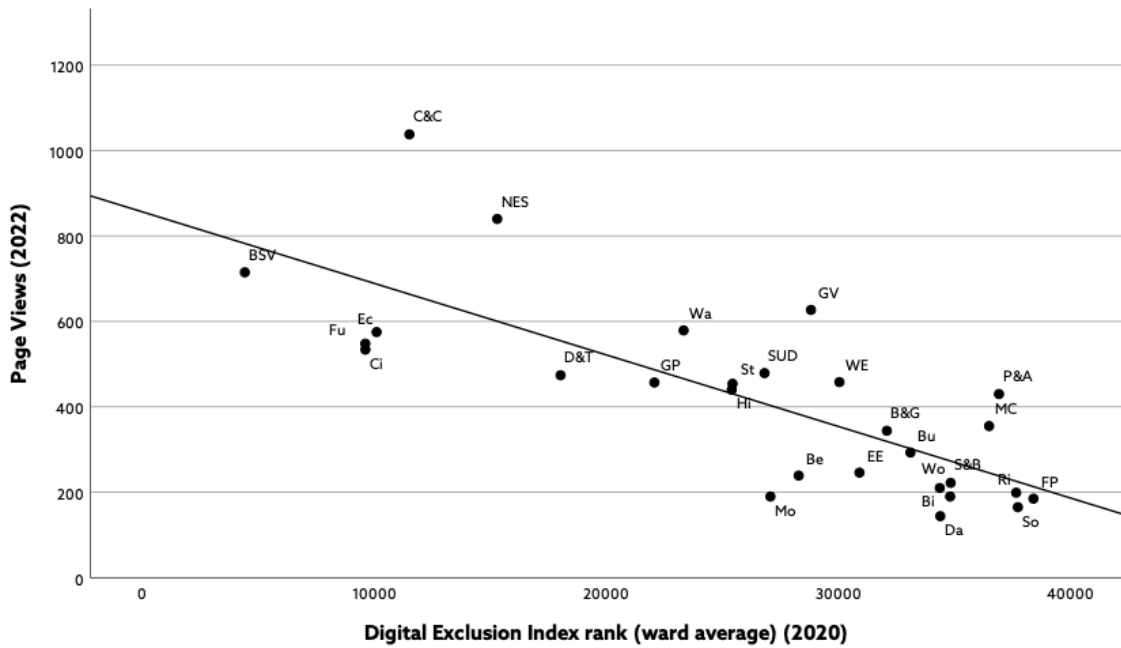
We look at deprivation using a widely-used measure called the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019). The IMD places areas into a decile and we calculated the average for each ward. The higher the ward score, the lower the level of deprivation.



Pearson's Correlation = 0.549

## Page Views and Digital Exclusion

We use a measure called the Digital Exclusion Index, which ranks between 1 and 42,616. The higher the rank, the more digitally excluded an area.

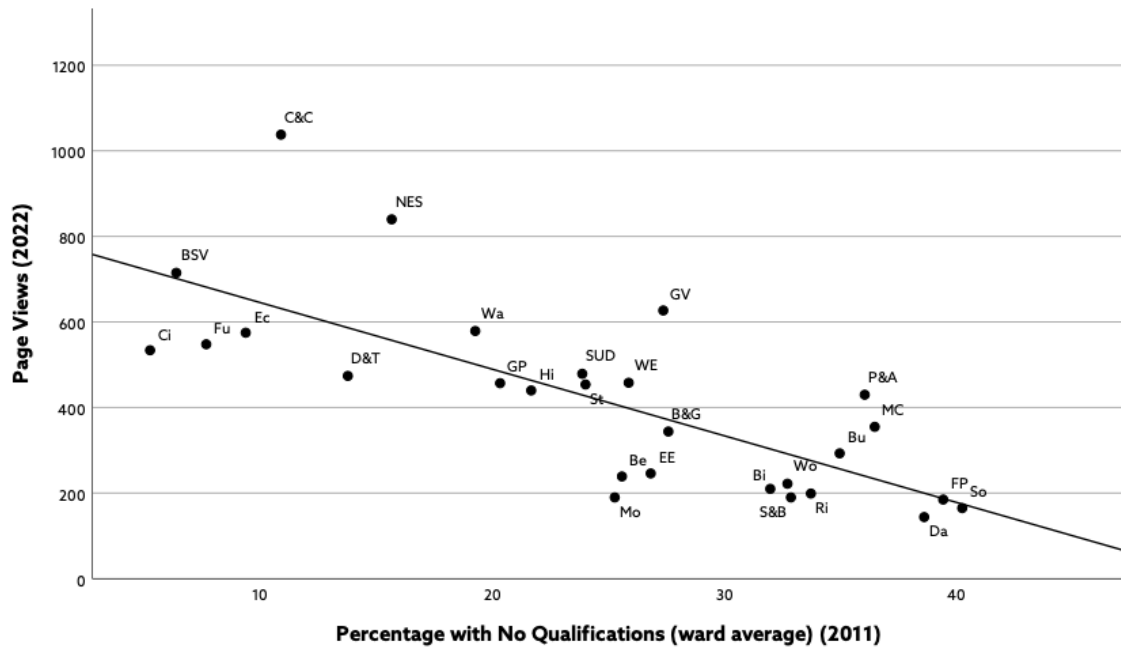


Pearson's Correlation = -0.772



## Page Views and No Qualifications

'No qualifications' is the proportion of people aged 16+ with no academic, vocational or professional qualifications.<sup>15</sup>



Pearson's Correlation = -0.748

Page views and IMD decile are correlated; wards with higher deprivation tend to have lower page views. This finding echoes wider research on political engagement and turnout.<sup>16</sup> Results for digital exclusion and no qualifications are similar. The higher the digital exclusion the lower the page views, and the higher % of no qualifications in a ward, the lower the page views. Furthermore, these demographic factors are interrelated.<sup>17</sup> One of our interviewees described how this plays out in their ward:

*"My ward is up there [in the] top 10 most deprived wards in the city. If you look at some of the data on attainment and achievement, the skill base here is very, very low. The pandemic brought a lot of issues to the surface. And one of them was digital exclusion [...] it wasn't just not having equipment, it's also the cost [...] and people not being skilled up to do the basics."*

It's important to clarify that there is no proven causality here. However, a 'resource model' approach suggests reasons for such patterns. It takes effort and time to engage with politics. Those with more resources and skills are more likely to have the confidence and know-how. Gaining a qualification through school, college, or university can often develop and support these skills. But this

<sup>15</sup> Data available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks501ew>

<sup>16</sup> Rallings and Thrasher (1997) *Local Elections in Britain*

<sup>17</sup> Norris (2001) *Digital Divide*

is also linked to deprivation. The less well off tend to have less time and money to invest in digital technology or gaining a qualification and so these issues can reinforce each other.

There is a divide across the east and the west of the city in terms of political engagement, deprivation, digital exclusion and qualifications. This has consequences for the outcome of local elections. It also impacts how parties campaign across the city. For instance, our interviewee from earlier said:

*“When I was campaigning in other parts of the city, we were doing short videos, messaging on Twitter and on Facebook. So you were able to use social media as a platform in other parts of the city because the skill set and the means to have resources is completely different.”*

One implication of this is that those who are arguably most likely to utilise council services, and/or most affected by changes, are least likely to have a say in who is representing them as a decision-maker. In addition, politicians are more likely to cater to the desires of voters than non-voters. This can lead to greater political alienation.

The optimistic perspective on digital tools is that they can strengthen democracy, especially by improving access to information for all citizens. The more pessimistic take is that they can entrench existing inequalities. Our findings suggest the project is mirroring current inequalities.

## Conclusions & Next Steps

## In conclusion...

Our approach for this project was to learn how *WhoismyCouncillor?* fits into the political landscape of Sheffield. To examine this we asked:

1. What do local parties think about the site? Our findings find general support for *WhoismyCouncillor?* but important potential barriers and trade-offs to involvement
2. Who in Sheffield uses the site? Our findings suggest the project mirrors current inequalities across wards

Through the process of exploring these questions we have also shed light on important patterns and the context shaping Sheffield's local political landscape.

## Next steps

In response to these findings, *WhoismyCouncillor?* will:

- Pledge to run the site again in 2023. However, we're a team of 3 volunteers - our inbox is always open to those interested in getting involved.
- Add information about local elections in Sheffield to the site, as part of increasing understanding of the democratic process.
- Contact political parties early in 2023 to allow as much time as possible for completion of surveys where candidates have been selected.
- Provide more information about the team and our backgrounds, which can now be found at [whoismycouncillor.co.uk/about](http://whoismycouncillor.co.uk/about).
- Focus on reaching the Sheffield electorate in 2023, across all communities and wards

A final note from the initiative: we are a small team with no funding. We strive to do the best where we can within our limits. There were only 4 weeks to do this project, and as with all research it brought up many more questions than it answered. Further research to help strengthen local democracy and tackle inequalities in Sheffield should focus on:

- Citizen opinions: The public are a crucial side of this equation, whose voices are currently missing. Many of our findings have to make assumptions about what the electorate think and do.
- Inequalities: We have touched upon a few of the inequalities intertwined with local politics in Sheffield, but there is so much more that it is crucial to examine in order to address them.
- Impact of the initiative: It is very very hard to measure this, but it would be useful in securing the future of *WhoismyCouncillor?* and potentially inspiring other communities to build similar initiatives.

Report by Eleanor Holmshaw and Luke Temple 2022

Front page photo by Benjamin Elliott on Unsplash

**WHO IS MY  
COUNCILLOR.  
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