

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL:

Powering Tomorrow's World



#ABZdeal

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

November 2023
Edition #5

FOCUSING ON GETTING RURAL SCOTLAND BETTER CONNECTED

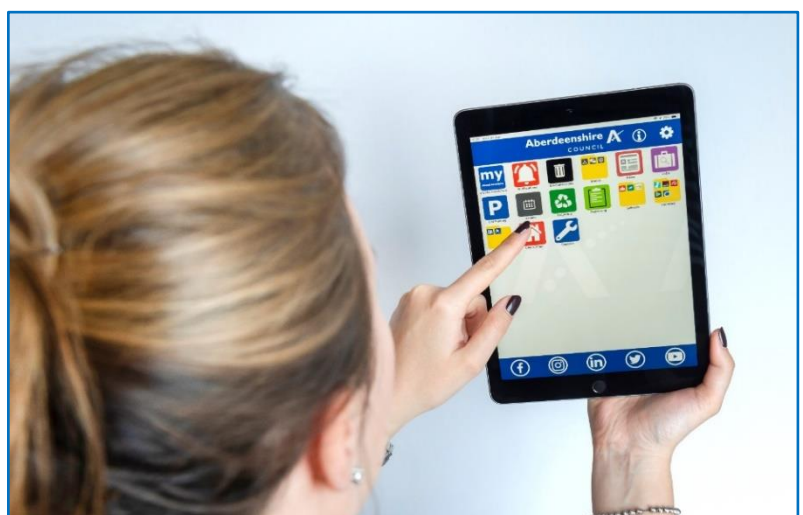
The drive to improve digital connectivity in rural Scotland represents a vital step towards bridging the urban-rural digital divide and unlocking the vast potential of these remote areas. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and reliant on digital technologies, ensuring that all communities, no matter how rural, have access to high-speed internet is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

Digital connectivity is not just about faster downloads and smoother streaming; it's about economic growth, educational opportunities, and quality of life. In the Aberdeen City Region, improved connectivity means businesses can expand their reach, farmers can utilise precision agriculture techniques, and healthcare providers can offer telemedicine services. It allows students to access online education and widens the scope for remote working, reducing the need to migrate to urban areas.

The Scottish government, alongside private sector investments, is making strides in expanding broadband and mobile coverage to remote communities, utilising a combination of fibre-optic infrastructure, satellite technology, and government-backed schemes. These efforts are not only about connecting people but also ensuring their prosperity.

As we all continue to embrace the digital age, the drive to enhance connectivity is a testament to the country's commitment to inclusivity, innovation, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the fast-paced world of technology.

The Aberdeen City Region Deal (ACRD) is a partnership between



Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Opportunity North East, Scottish Government and UK Government. The Deal is one delivery mechanism for the regional economic strategy and is investing in sector innovation projects and infrastructure to support economic diversification and resilience. Signed in November 2016, both Governments committed to jointly investing up to £250 million over a 10-year period. These commitments form part of an overarching £826 million funding package for the Aberdeen City Region Deal.

More information and detail on the Aberdeen City Region Deal can be found at www.abzdeal.com.

Within the Aberdeen City Region Deal, the Digital Programme encompasses innovative and exciting projects. Within this workstream, the Digital Engagement Team was created with a remit to directly support residents, businesses and communities, in matters relating to digital connectivity, and to work with all necessary stakeholders to find ways to improve digital connectivity for the Region.

The Digital Engagement Team is striving to work more closely with communities and residents, in all matters relating to digital connectivity:

- ✓ *Working with the Telecoms Industry to improve network coverage*
- ✓ *Supporting Community Resilience*
- ✓ *Promoting Digital Inclusion*
- ✓ *Leveraging Economic Outcomes*
- ✓ *Developing Community Connectivity Solutions*
- ✓ *Scottish Government's Reaching 100% Programme (R100)*
- ✓ *UK Government's Project Gigabit*
- ✓ *Shared Rural Network*
- ✓ *Working with Scottish 5G Centre*
- ✓ *Lobbying to Ensure Future Commitments from Government*

The Digital Engagement Team is ready and eager to support any resident, any business, and any community in the region, in matters relating to digital connectivity, and welcome any enquiry to:

[**digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk**](mailto:digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

or by phone at

01467 469322

REACHING 100% & SCOTTISH BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME

The Reaching 100% Programme, also known as R100, is one of the most ambitious projects of its kind in Europe, with an objective of improving broadband connections to thousands of properties across Scotland, and an overarching aim to ensure every premise in Scotland can access a minimum of 30Mbps superfast speeds. For the Aberdeen City Region, this programme is funding the deployment of full-fibre broadband connections to nearly 17,000 premises, between 2022 and 2028.

At the end of October, nearly **3,500** premises in **Aberdeenshire** have been upgraded to full-fibre broadband, with over **200** premises in **Aberdeen City** also being upgraded. The weighting of the work being heavily in Aberdeenshire shows the commitment to tackle the challenges in rural areas, where the digital connectivity gap is larger. In the last month, residents in St Cyrus, Old Rayne, Ellon and Meikle Wartle are the latest beneficiaries of new full-fibre broadband connections delivered by Openreach and their supply chain partners, as the contractor of the R100.



Alongside Openreach's deployment of full-fibre infrastructure, the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) continues to offer up to £5,000 of subsidy to install a superfast broadband solution, for premises that will not benefit from commercial, or publicly funded, broadband improvements. **838** of these

vouchers have now been used across the region, but with over **5,800** vouchers still available, there is a huge opportunity for residents, businesses, and communities to use the R100 SBVS vouchers to install newer, faster broadband solutions.

The Digital Engagement Team has directly supported residents, communities and businesses to utilise vouchers, to install faster broadband solutions using a variety of technologies. The team also works closely with all telecoms operators who use these vouchers, and is able to provide specific, tailored advice on the best solutions for your property. With access to a wide range of data and information, the team is eager to support any resident in the process of using a voucher, or to provide more detailed information on the R100 programme. Contact the team:

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

PROJECT GIGABIT & GIGABIT BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME

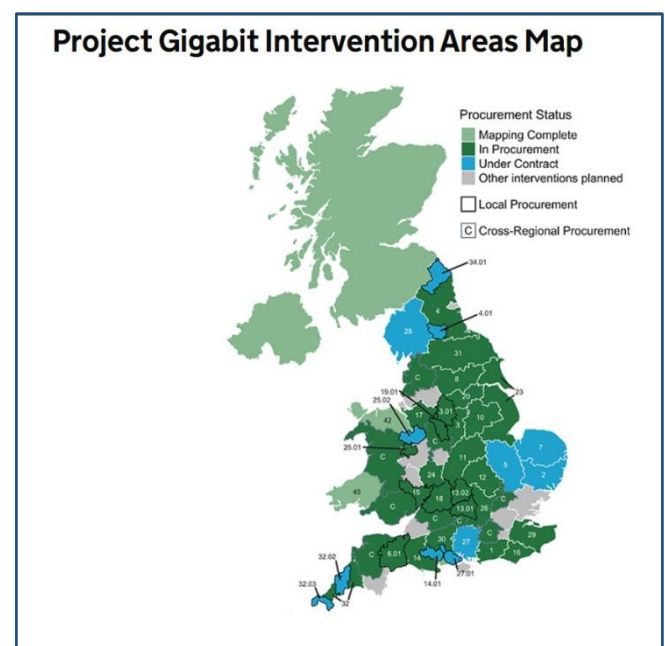
Project Gigabit is the connectivity initiative from UK Government aiming to accelerate the deployment of gigabit-capable (1Gbps / 1000Mbps speed) broadband across the whole of the United Kingdom. The project's primary goal is to ensure that every home and business in the UK can access high-speed internet, specifically gigabit-capable connections. The initiative aims to address digital infrastructure gaps and bridge the digital divide by extending faster, and more reliable, broadband services to underserved and hard-to-reach areas. Project Gigabit includes: funding and provision of subsidy from UK Government; Partnerships between Government and the Telecoms Industry; Neutrality in technology; Promoting Digital Inclusion for everyone.

At this time, there are still announcements to be made on how Project Gigabit will move forward in Scotland. Ongoing conversations between Westminster and Holyrood, involving stakeholders from the telecoms industry and other bodies continue, and we expect announcements by the end of the year on what comes next. If the programme follows what is happening in other parts of the UK, we could see 'Lots' identified in pockets of Scotland, which will be opened for your procurement, allowing telecoms companies to bid for public monies to subsidise further provision of full-fibre in hard to reach areas. The Digital Engagement Team, on behalf of the Aberdeen City Region Deal, has been making the case for North East Scotland to see further commitment from Government around connectivity.

Project Gigabit's more visible branch in Scotland has been the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS), which can provide up to £4,500 of subsidy for residents to source a gigabit capable broadband solution, where there is no other improvements planned. This voucher could also be used in conjunction with the R100 SBVS. Presently, as Project Gigabit is moving to a procurement phase in Scotland, GBVS applications have been temporarily paused across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Once the status of the next phase of Project Gigabit in Scotland is known, vouchers may become available again. Over 500 GBVS vouchers were used across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire before its pause, which is believed to be some of the highest uptake in Scotland, showing the stark need for Government support in closing the digital divide.

A full update on Project Gigabit from the September 2023 update can be found at:

www.gov.uk/publications/project-gigabit



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THE LOCAL VIEW

On the right, you can see four separate examples of how the Reaching 100% programme and R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme have benefitted Aberdeenshire residents.

In addition to these good news stories, this month we want to highlight an example of how connectivity solutions can be obtained in even the most rural locations.

John contacted the Digital Engagement Team looking for a connectivity solution at his property located within Clashindarroch Forest. His property does not have mains electricity, or an existing phoneline for internet connection.

By working with John to identify his needs, and by engaging with a range of telecoms operators who could deploy solutions at his location, the Digital Engagement Team established, that despite the rurality of the property, 4G solutions, fixed wireless solutions, and satellite broadband solutions could all provide a strong, stable and reliable broadband connection.

Weighing the pros and cons of the different solutions and operators, John settled on an Enhanced 4G LTE solution, which now provides his rural property with superfast broadband of at least 40-50Mbps, allowing John to be digitally connected, and digitally included, despite his rural location.

"I was spending a fortune on data bundles on my mobile phone to keep connected, not knowing that were better options out there. The Digital Engagement Team give fantastic support through clear information and advice, which helped me get my cheaper, and more reliable, internet solution."

The Digital Engagement Team works across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council areas, with a remit to support residents, businesses and communities in matters relating to digital connectivity. For support in your situation, please contact the team at:

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

01467 469322



Reaching 100%
Digital Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

"A SUPERFAST CONNECTION HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO HOME-SCHOOL MY SON DURING THE PANDEMIC AND ENABLED ME TO WORK FROM HOME. IT ALSO ALLOWS US TO STREAM FILMS IN REAL-TIME, SOMETHING THAT WE COULD NOT DO BEFORE."

Richard from Aberdeenshire

CHECK YOUR ADDRESS AT WWW.SCOTLANDSUPERFAST.COM



Digital Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

"I CAN NOW WORK FROM HOME SUCCESSFULLY AND NO LONGER HAVE TO COMMUTE ON A DAILY BASIS. HAVING A SUPERFAST CONNECTION HAS MADE LIFE A LOT EASIER."

DUNCAN, FROM ABERDEENSHIRE

APPLY AND CHECK YOUR ADDRESS AT: WWW.SCOTLANDSUPERFAST.COM



Digital Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

"FASTER DOWNLOAD TIMES HAS IMPROVED MY DAY-TO-DAY LIFE. MY PARTNER AND I BOTH DOWNLOAD DIGITAL GAMES ONTO VIDEO GAME CONSOLES AND THE LARGE FILE SIZES WOULD SOMETIMES TAKE DAYS TO DOWNLOAD PRIOR TO UPGRADING."

New Deer, Aberdeenshire resident

APPLY AND CHECK YOUR ADDRESS AT:
www.scotlandsuperfast.com



Digital Scotland

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

"I RUN A FARRIER AND ONLINE TABLE TENNIS COACHING BUSINESS. HAVING A RELIABLE SERVICE WITH HUGELY IMPROVED COVERAGE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE HELP TO BOTH MY BUSINESS AND PERSONAL LIFE."

"BEING ABLE TO DOWNLOAD, POST VIDEOS AND CARRY OUT COACHING SESSIONS WITHOUT ANY PROBLEMS IS FANTASTIC."

ROB TANNER
Bohton Turriff (Aberdeenshire)

MOVE TO DIGITAL VOICE – PSTN RETIREMENT

The telecoms industry is retiring the aged Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in 2025, which means all phone call services will be moved over to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). But what does this mean for customers and residents?

Moving from PSTN to VoIP

- The landline phone number can be retained, and is 'ported' over to the digital service. Similar to mobile phone numbers, once ported, the number can be moved between operators with ease. Once the number is ported, the analogue copper phonenumber will be reassigned, and only provide internet communication services.
- Telecoms providers may provide residents with a new wi-fi router for the property, for the purpose of offering broadband and VoIP. This doesn't mean that a broadband service must be purchased, as many telecoms operators have confirmed they will continue to offer voice only services for residents who do not want an internet service.
- Landline phone handsets will no longer be plugged in to the wall phone socket in the property, but will instead be plugged in to the back of the wi-fi router. Many phone handsets will work straight away with this new set-up, however a small adapter can be provided by the telecoms provider if a handset doesn't work in the new set-up.
- Accessibility devices, such as textphones, text relay services, amplified phones etc, are all available to work over VoIP connections.
- There will be some changes to how specialist equipment may work with the new technology. If there are devices that are connected to the landline such as telecare alarms, emergency pendants, dialysis machines and telemetry devices, residents should contact the provider of those devices to ensure compatibility with the new system.



VoIP in Power Cuts

Unlike the PSTN, VoIP services will not work by default in the event of a power cut. Once a landline connection is moved to VoIP, the electrical current will no longer be provided through the phoneline, with the whole system being switched off in 2025.

Ofcom has published guidance that states telecoms operators must provide a solution to residents that allow them to make calls in the event of a power cut. It is up to residents to ask for these resilience solutions when taking out a VoIP service. If a resident is dependent on their landline, these solutions must be offered to customers free-of-charge. These solutions will either be:

- a) The provision of a mobile phone handset with SIM card, which can allow residents to make calls when the power goes out.
- b) The provision of a wi-fi router with an integral battery, or a battery pack for an existing router. This battery solution will provide power to the router, allowing for phone calls to be made, and ability to use the internet.

It is important to note that there may be resilience issues in the available mobile phone network in the event of a power cut. Where 4G coverage is not reliable, residents should opt for a battery back-up solution. For more detail on the Ofcom guidance around ensuring calls can be made in a power cut, the guidance document can be found at [ofcom.org.uk](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk).

Further Information

The Digital Engagement Team exists to support residents, businesses and communities in all matters relating to digital connectivity. If there are any queries, questions or requirements for more tailored support in these matters, enquiries are welcome.

by email: digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

or by phone: 01467 469322

online: [aberdeenshire.gov.uk/digital-connectivity/](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/digital-connectivity/)

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DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT TEAM JOURNAL

As the month of October brought storms Babet and Ciaran, the Digital Engagement Team has spent more time this month supporting communities around resilience plans. Resilience in the telecoms networks is vital to ensure that vulnerable residents are supported, and that communities can both inform and be informed by appropriate authorities and organisations.

The Digital Engagement Team attended and supported the Community Resilience Conference held at Aberdeen Beach Ballroom on 2nd October. This conference was a joint event between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City councils, and provided a wealth of information, guidance and support to community councils and other groups, in developing resilience plans. As a result of this, the Team has been engaging with a number of community groups to provide detailed analysis and advice on what resilience the different telecoms networks have in their areas. The Team is keen to engage with any other group who have these concerns.

The number of enquiries to the team in October was lower than in previous months, however **127 premises** received direct support from the Digital Engagement Team in matters relating to digital connectivity. **72%** of these enquiries were resolved in month with a positive outcome. The team continues to support the remaining properties.

A couple of additional highlights in October have been:

- Completion of a small Fibre Community Partnership which has utilised the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme to connect 9 premises to full-fibre FTTP broadband. These premises were not in plan to receive upgraded broadband through any known plans, but were able to leverage available subsidy to obtain future proof broadband.
- Working with an Aberdeenshire based alternative telecoms operator to maximise impact of a new connectivity project to benefit up to 100 residents.
- Attending a meeting of Donside Community Council, to provide advice and information on the connectivity challenges in this large and rural Community Council area, with particular focus on finding solutions for residents in the Strathdon area.

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CALL TO ARMS!

We all understand that access to reliable and fast digital connectivity is no longer a luxury but a necessity. It has become a vital lifeline that connects us to essential services, educational opportunities, economic growth, and social interactions. However, many residents still face challenges when it comes to digital connectivity. It is important to raise your voices and actively engage with one another to advocate for improved digital infrastructure.

The digital divide continues to impact individuals, families, and businesses in our area, limiting our potential and hindering progress. But we have the power to change that. By joining forces and making our voices heard, we can encourage key stakeholders to prioritise digital connectivity and take tangible steps towards bridging the gap.

So, how can you make a difference?

Contact Your Local Council: Reach out to the Digital Engagement Team directly and express your concerns about the state of digital connectivity in your community. Share personal stories and highlight the impact it has on your daily life, education, and business endeavours. Help us to prioritise improving digital infrastructure and expanding coverage in underserved areas.

- **Form Community Alliances:** Join forces with fellow residents, community groups, and local businesses who share the same concerns. Together, organise meetings, petitions, or awareness campaigns to bring attention to the issue and amplify our collective voice. A united front will have a greater impact on the decision-making processes.
- **Stay Informed:** Stay up to date with local council meetings, discussions, and initiatives related to digital connectivity. Attend public forums and consultations to voice your concerns and contribute to the decision-making process. Being informed allows us to engage effectively and make a more significant impact.



Remember, change begins with us all. Let's take action and work together to ensure that every community's digital connectivity needs are met. By contacting the Digital Engagement Team and advocating for better digital infrastructure, we can empower ourselves and future generations to thrive in the interconnected world.

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Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



The Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



UK
Government



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THE MONTH AHEAD

What's coming up in the month ahead to be aware of in Digital Connectivity?

Some dates to be aware of:

- **7th November** – Aberdeen Tech Day is being held in the Sandman Signature Hotel in Aberdeen. This event is the City's inaugural event dedicated to helping stakeholders discover the latest advancements in AV, Cyber Security, AI, Telecoms and more, from the world's leading tech vendors.
- **16th November** – The Cairngorms Digital Steering Group will meet to discuss the challenges and opportunities around Digital Connectivity and other areas, affecting the Cairngorms National Park
- **21st November** – Digital Scotland 2023 conference is being held at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. Digital Scotland is the largest annual gathering of public sector technology professionals, where global govtech leaders share technology insights and lessons in digital transformation, leadership, skills, cultural change and data-driven innovation.
- **23rd November** – the Digital Engagement Team will be meeting with Scottish Land & Estates to speak to representatives of the rural Estates on Deeside, to provide advice and support in improving connectivity.
- **30th November** – Scottish Government will be holding their Quarterly Digital Connectivity Update event, providing news and information to all 32 Local Authorities, as well as other key stakeholders. This event also gives the Digital Engagement Team a platform to ask questions, and push for further work to improve digital connectivity in North East Scotland.

Additionally, the Digital Engagement Team will continue to support residents, businesses and communities through direct enquiries to the team, whilst continuing to work closely with telecoms operators.

DIRECTORY

Supplier Name	Website	Full Fibre	Fixed Wireless	Fixed Mobile	Satellite
Assured Telecoms Ltd	https://www.assuredtelecoms.co.uk/	Yes			
Bentley Walker	https://bentley-walker.com/			Yes	Yes
Converged Rural Broadband	www.crb.scot	Yes	Yes		
Cerberus Networks Ltd.	https://www.cerberusnetworks.co.uk/	Yes			
Converged Communication Solutions Ltd.	https://converged.co.uk/	Yes			Yes
External Reality Ltd.	https://externalreality.co.uk/	Yes		Yes	
Fibairo	https://www.fibairo.com/	Yes	Yes		
Fibre 1	https://fibre1.uk/	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Flexifi	https://flexifi.co.uk/	Yes		Yes	Yes
Formartinet	http://formartinet.co.uk/		Yes		
GoFibre	https://gofibre.co.uk/	Yes	Yes		
IFB	https://www.ifb.net/	Yes		Yes	
Leisure Connect	https://www.myleisureconnect.co.uk/	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Marykirk.com	https://www.marykirk.com/	Yes	Yes		
National Broadband	https://www.national-broadband.co.uk/			Yes	
Northsat Ltd	http://www.northsat.co.uk/		Yes	Yes	Yes
Not Spot Broadband	https://notspotbroadband.com/	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Openreach	https://www.openreach.com/	Yes			
Rural Communications	https://www.rural-communications.com/	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Scotnet.co.uk Ltd	https://www.scotnet.co.uk/	Yes	Yes		
Scot-Tel-Gould Ltd	https://www.scot-tel-gould.co.uk/index.html	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Starlink	https://www.starlink.com/				Yes
Transmitair Ltd / Rapier Systems Ltd.	https://transmitair.com/	Yes	Yes	Yes	
UltraNetworks Ltd	https://www.ultranetworks.co.uk/	Yes	Yes		
WiFab	https://www.wifab.co.uk			Yes	

DIRECTORY

Below, you will also find a number of useful websites in relation to digital connectivity:

Name	Website
Aberdeen City Region Deal	www.abz-deal.investaberdeen.co.uk/
Reaching 100% & Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme	www.scotlandsuperfast.com
Project Gigabit	www.gov.uk/guidance/project-gigabit-uk-gigabit-programme
Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme	www.gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/
Shared Rural Network (SRN)	www.srn.org.uk/
Ofcom Coverage Checkers	www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/advice/ofcom-checker
Ofcom Connected Nations	www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/infrastructure-research/summer-2023
PSTN Retirement	www.futureofvoice.co.uk/
Openreach Fibre Community Partnerships	www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/fibre-community-partnership
Aberdeenshire Council Digital Connectivity	www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/business-support/communities/digital-connectivity/
Previous editions of Digital Engagement Newsletter	www.publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/digital-engagement-newsletter

CONTACT US

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Website

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/business-support/communities/digital-connectivity/