

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL:

Powering Tomorrow's World



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



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DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

October 2023
Edition #4

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY CONTINUES TO BE A PRIORITY FOR NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

In the Connections Nations Update: Summer 2023, Ofcom have provided the latest connectivity information as of May 2023. As the industry regulator, Ofcom provides these updates on a quarterly basis, and the most recent update provides both positives and negatives.

On one side, the opportunities for improving digital connectivity across the Aberdeen City Region are clear. Across both Aberdeenshire & Aberdeen City, over 21,000 households cannot access a superfast broadband service of at least 30Mbps, with over 5,500 of those properties unable to receive even the most basic of 5Mbps speeds. Aberdeenshire's rural areas, continue to face the biggest challenges with regards to a fast broadband connection.

However, there is a lot to be positive about. Aberdeenshire is seeing some of the steepest upwards trend in Superfast Broadband connectivity in Scotland, with nearly 4,000 premises being upgraded to at least superfast in the past year. In addition to this, over 18,000 new full-fibre connections have been made in the last 12 months, across the Aberdeen City Region.

Seeing steep improvements on graphs is always easier to do when the gap to close is so big, however credit should be given to the telecoms industry for their continuing commercial deployment across the region, as well as to the Scottish Government's Reaching 100% programme. It is also important to highlight the work being achieved through the Aberdeen City Region Deal, and the Digital Programme within it.

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 Connectivity Forum, UK Government's primary advisory group on the provision on digital connectivity, published a report over the summer which highlights the important role to be played by Local Authorities, and gives insight and recommendation as to how the Aberdeen City Region Deal can facilitate further improvements. This report can be found at www.connectivityuk.org/publications

The digital divide continues to be a significant area of focus for the Partners and Stakeholders within the Aberdeen City Region, and it is important to highlight the work being done to improve connectivity, and to support residents be better engaged through digital means. This newsletter aims to keep our communities, our representatives, and our stakeholders informed, and aware of what is happening, and what can still be achieved.

The Digital Engagement Team is ready and eager to support anyone in matters relating to digital connectivity, and welcome any enquiry to:

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

or by phone at

01467 469322.

REACHING 100% & SCOTTISH BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME

As the hours of sunlight lessen, the work being done by Openreach and their supply chain, through Scottish Government's Reaching 100% Programme continues to drive forward. Properties in and around Oldmeldrum have been the main beneficiaries to be upgraded to full-fibre FTTP broadband in the most recent activity, with residents around Inverurie, Old Rayne and Pitcaple seeing works that will result in upgrading connections in the coming month.

At the time of publishing this newsletter, over 3,500 premises have now been connected to gigabit capable broadband infrastructure through the Reaching 100% (R100) Programme, across both Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire. 94% of all the connections have been made in Aberdeenshire, showing the commitment of this programme to target the rural, hard-to-reach areas. The R100 will continue to build new infrastructure right through until 2028, with just under 13,000 premises still in scope to get a new fibre broadband connection.

Alongside the work being done by Openreach, the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS), provides up to £5,000 of subsidy for premises that will not benefit from commercial, or publicly funded, broadband improvements. 825 vouchers have now been used across the region, but with nearly 6,000 vouchers still available, there is a huge opportunity for residents and communities to use the R100 SBVS to install broadband solutions that guarantee a superfast broadband connection.

The Digital Engagement Team has supported residents and communities to install Enhanced 4G Broadband systems, Fixed Wireless broadband solutions, Satellite Broadband connections, and has also actively facilitated full-fibre broadband projects, all using the available subsidy through the R100 SBVS. With only 12% of the available vouchers used, there is an extraordinary amount of public subsidy still available for residents, right across Aberdeenshire, and in some pockets of Aberdeen City.

You can check your own property's status in the Reaching 100% Programme by using the postcode checker online at www.scotlandsuperfast.com.

Digital connectivity is more important now than it has ever been. The Digital Engagement Team within Aberdeenshire Council is ready, able and eager to support every single resident who needs it, in finding and accessing improved broadband connectivity, and is abreast of all the different forms of support available, including the R100 build plans, and the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme.

We work closely with telecoms operators of all sizes, and have strong relationships with numerous key stakeholders. Armed with a huge amount of data and information, the Digital Engagement Team will work with you and your community, to conduct localised mapping and research, to provide tailored support, advice and guidance. Please contact the Digital Engagement Team at:

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk



PROJECT GIGABIT

Building fast, reliable broadband for everyone in the UK



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology



**GIGABIT BROADBAND
VOUCHER SCHEME**

PROJECT GIGABIT

Project Gigabit is the overarching £5billion programme from UK Government, aiming to close the digital divide by improving digital connectivity across the UK, bringing gigabit capable connections to as many residents and premises as possible.

In April, the UK Government launched an £8 million fund to provide capital grants to further promote new satellite connectivity to a small cohort of up to 35,000 of the very hardest to reach premises. Because of the rurality of some parts of Aberdeenshire, it is very likely that some properties in the region will fall into this Very Hard to Reach category. Final details on the grants, and the application process is still to be determined, and we are hopeful that more information will be provided along with the Project Gigabit procurement announcements later in the year.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government carried out lengthy market engagement through an Open Market Review (OMR), to gauge interest from the telecoms industry on what Project Gigabit may look like in Scotland, and to better understand where existing commercial plans would reach, so as to best identify the parts of Scotland in most need of further support. Following the OMR, a Public Review (PR) was launched, seeking further information and responses from suppliers, businesses, public sector partners and various other stakeholders. With both these processes now closed, Scottish and UK Governments are working together to determine the best procurement process for Project Gigabit in Scotland. We expect to hear announcements on this later in the year.

The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS) has now been paused in Scotland, following the same process as other parts of the UK, now that Project Gigabit is moving to a procurement phase in Scotland. To date, we know that nearly 500 GBVS have been used by residents across Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire, which is believed to be some of the highest uptake in Scotland.

A full update on Project Gigabit across the UK can be found on www.gov.uk with a link here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/project-gigabit-progress-update-september-2023

THE LOCAL VIEW

A small community of residents West of Ellon, reached out the Digital Engagement Team this year, looking for some support and advice on obtaining improved broadband connectivity. Due to differing information from different sources, they were unsure as to what improvements there may be in the future, of if there was any grants or subsidy available.

All properties in the small rural community were eligible for the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, until early 2023, when the eligibility for this support was removed. The Digital Engagement Team was able to work closely with Openreach, and Scottish Government, to confirm that these properties had been added into commercial plans to provide full-fibre broadband in the coming years.



The first positive as a result of six premises in a rural Aberdeenshire, and now been added to plans to be upgraded to gigabit capable broadband infrastructure.

By working with the residents, and with a range of local and national telecoms operators, the Digital Engagement Team was also able to support a combined, bespoke broadband solution for these residents. By aggregating the support from the residents, a new Fixed Wireless broadband solution was deployed, accessible by all residents in this small community, providing superfast broadband access, where it was not previously accessible.

The second positive as a result of these premises can access an alternative superfast broadband solution, giving them digital access now, whilst they wait for full-fibre installation.

"Within three weeks, the new equipment was installed and is working brilliantly! The service provided by the company was exemplary. We understand that fibre broadband will come to us at some stage, but living with 1Mbps for so long has been agony. Our new broadband system is working really well. Thanks for all your help!"

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

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
01467 469322

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for everyone

MOVE TO DIGITAL VOICE - PSTN RETIREMENT

The retirement of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) is a significant transition that residents need to be aware of. Here's what you need to know:

- **Transition to VoIP:** The PSTN is being phased out in favour of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology. This means your landline phone service will soon rely on the internet. Once implemented, landline phones will be plugged in to your router instead of the wall phone socket, and calls will be made over the internet connection, instead of the old analogue connection.
- **Backup Power:** Unlike traditional landlines that work during power outages, VoIP relies on electricity and internet connectivity. Service providers can, and will, provide resilience solutions that allow residents to make calls in the event of a power cut. Ofcom also provides guidance that states it is the responsibility of the telecoms providers to ensure that solutions to allow residents to make calls in the event of a power cut, are provided free-of-charge to residents likely to experience such events.
- **Service Provision:** Research different VoIP service providers and plans available in your area. Compare prices, features, and customer reviews to find the best fit for your needs. Consider factors like call quality, customer support, and international calling options. You can keep your existing phone number when transitioning to VoIP. Discuss this with your chosen provider to avoid any disruptions.
- **Data & Speed Requirements:** VoIP consumes a very small amount of internet data, so be mindful of your data plan if you have limited bandwidth. Most Service Providers can provide VoIP only services for residents who do not wish to have an internet package. VoIP services also require a minimal amount of bandwidth or broadband speed, and so even premises with older copper broadband connections, will still be able to easily utilise VoIP services.
- **Timeline:** Stay informed about the timeline for the PSTN retirement. This process is happening across the UK, and will reach all areas of the UK at different times. For more information and support, the Digital Engagement Team is eager to answer questions and provide impartial advice to residents, businesses and communities - contact them at digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. Speak to your current provider of phone/broadband services, to ask for their timelines on making the switch to VoIP. More information on the retirement of the PSTN can be found at Future of Voice at www.futureofvoice.co.uk.

In conclusion, the retirement of the PSTN in the UK is a technological advancement that will bring numerous benefits, but it requires some preparation and awareness. By taking these steps and staying informed, you can ensure uninterrupted communication in the digital age.

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DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT TEAM JOURNAL

September was a busy month for the Digital Engagement Team. Through all streams of work, *325 premises* have been engaged with, and have received support in matters relating to digital connectivity. *70%* of all enquiries were resolved with a positive outcome.

Additionally, some of the highlights from the last month include:

- In depth analysis and support for the Inchmarlo, Brathens & Glassel Community Council. This Community Council is a rural, and digitally disadvantaged area of Aberdeenshire, and consists of a mix of premises with superfast broadband, and premises with very poor connectivity. Ongoing work aims to map out a range of connectivity options for this CC area, to best maximise available public subsidy through the R100 programme, and Project Gigabit.
- Scottish Government and Openreach representatives provided a welcome operational update on the Reaching 100% programme, specifically for the Aberdeenshire area. The Digital Engagement Team was supported by Aberdeenshire Council's Roads department, to ask the important questions on how Openreach are continuing to deliver their work, and advance digital infrastructure in the Aberdeen City region.
- Supporting a Fibre Community Partnership for the Denburn Telephone Exchange area in Aberdeen City, Openreach have now reached their pledge target from residents and businesses, and the Digital Engagement Team will be looking to further support on progressing this work to bring full-fibre infrastructure to excluded pockets of the City.
- The Digital Engagement Team has been working with Aberdeen City Region partners to explore application for the 5G Innovation Region Fund from Building Digital UK (BDUK), which can provide up to £3.8m of grant funding to explore innovation, and foster the ecosystem, for 5G technology and connectivity.

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The Scottish
Government
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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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THE MONTH AHEAD

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

Some dates to be aware of:

- **2nd October** - Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils are hosting a joint Community Resilience Conference at Aberdeen Beach Ballroom, where the Digital Engagement Team will be present to provide advice and support in the area of telecoms resilience.
- **10th - 11th October** - Future Farming Expo 2023 event being held at P&J Live, bringing together forward-thinking Scottish Farmers, advisors and rural businesses over two days for knowledge hubs, discussion, and networking.
- **17th October** - The Digital Engagement Team is presenting at the Donside Community Council, to provide insight into digital connectivity opportunities in the Strathdon area.
- **26th October** - The Digital Engagement Team will be in Stirling to meet with representatives from all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, and a range of stakeholders, for a Digital Connectivity event held by Scottish Government.

In addition to dates for the diary, the Digital Engagement Team is focusing on the following key areas in the month ahead:

- Working with a local telecoms operator and rural communities to explore a digital connectivity solution in the North of Aberdeenshire, which could be the first of its kind in Scotland
- Collaborating with partners in the Aberdeen City Region Deal to explore new ways to foster the 5G ecosystem in North East Scotland
- Working with a number of Community Councils to support in telecoms resilience planning, as well as supporting the development of Community Broadband projects.

DIRECTORY

There are a number of operators in and around Aberdeenshire, some of which are R100 and/or Gigabit registered. Their details can be found below:

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	

DIRECTORY

Supplier Namer	Website	Full Fibre	Fixed Wireless	Fixed Mobile	Satellite
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	

Below you will also find a number of useful websites in relation to Digital Connectivity:

Name	Website
R100	https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com
Shared Rural Network (SRN)	https://srn.org.uk/
Ofcom	https://www.ofcom.org.uk/home
PSTN	https://www.futureofvoice.co.uk
Openreach Fibre Community Partnership	https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/fibre-community-partnership
Project Gigabit	https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/

CONTACT US

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01467 469322

Website

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