

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL:

Powering Tomorrow's World



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



ONE
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DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

May 2024

LEADING THE WAY IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY SUPPORT

As we advance into a new financial year, we have an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved by the Digital Engagement Team in the past year, and assess where our priorities need to be in the year ahead. Maintaining digital connectivity as a priority for all the stakeholders in the Aberdeen City Region will continue to be a focus, as will continued support for the residents, businesses and communities across both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.

Over 2,000 premises in the Region have been supported by the Digital Engagement Team in the past 12 months, with the majority of these receiving support to improve their digital connectivity. Telecoms operators have been supported to grow their businesses, and deploy new infrastructure in hard to reach areas. Successful work and negotiation with Scottish and UK Governments has seen further rollout and development of both the Reaching 100% programme and Project Gigabit.

We are delighted to introduce this edition of the new-look, quarterly, Aberdeenshire Digital Connectivity Newsletter, aimed at keeping you informed about the latest developments, initiatives, and opportunities regarding digital connectivity support in our region.

In an increasingly digital world, access to reliable and high-speed internet connectivity is paramount for economic growth, social inclusion, and overall community well-being. Recognising this importance, Aberdeenshire Council, as part of the Aberdeen City Region Deal, is committed to doing everything it can to support the enhancement and improvement of digital infrastructure and ensuring that every resident, business, and community has access to the tools and resources they need to thrive in the digital age.

Through this newsletter, we aim to provide you with valuable insights into ongoing projects, partnerships, and resources dedicated to improving digital connectivity across the Region. Whether you are a business owner seeking to leverage digital technologies for growth, a community organisation looking to bridge the digital divide, or a resident interested in staying updated on broadband expansion initiatives, this newsletter is designed to keep you informed and empowered.

We invite you to stay engaged, share your feedback, and collaborate with us as we work together to build a more connected and prosperous Aberdeenshire for all.

Thank you for your continued support.

Digital Engagement Team – Aberdeen City Region

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ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL

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 Theme encompasses work being carried out by various stakeholders, to bring improved digital connectivity to the region, and to nurture innovation in the use of digital technology and connectivity, to bring economic benefits to the region. 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

or by phone at

01467 469322

PROJECT GIGABIT

Project Gigabit is the UK Government programme aiming to increase the availability of gigabit capable broadband infrastructure (i.e. 1000Mbps), with a target of reaching 85% of all premises by 2025, with the rest of the UK (or 99%) by 2030. In Scotland, delivery of Project Gigabit will be facilitated with the launch of 6 procurement lots, into which telecoms operators will bid for public subsidy to connect premises to gigabit capable broadband, which cannot currently access this, and are not in scope for any commercial or publicly funded plans to be upgraded to such.

Aberdeen City, along with the majority of **Aberdeenshire**, has been confirmed as being included in the Lot 5 regional procurement lot for Project Gigabit in Scotland, along with the **Moray Coast**, parts of **Angus** and **Dundee City**. The size and scope of this procurement lot has been determined with input from telecoms operators and the telecoms industry through a rolling Open Market review process.

Updates from Scottish and UK Governments indicate that **Lot 5** is expected to be opened for procurement in **Summer 2024**, with the procurement process likely to take a minimum of 12 months.

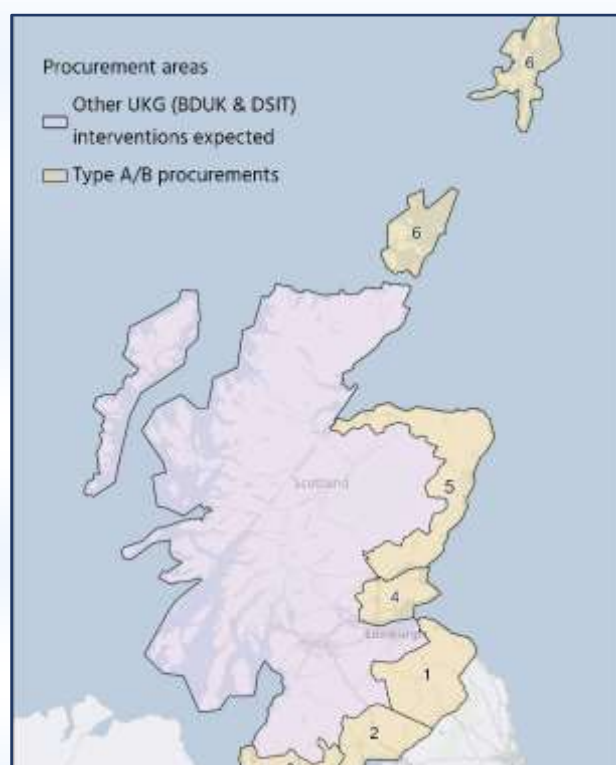
Once a successful bidder has been announced, at this point we expect to see delivery plans and premise lists, to fully understand where building of new infrastructure will be.

The Digital Engagement Team is committed to continue dialogue with all levels of Government, as well as with telecoms industry stakeholders, to monitor progress of Project Gigabit procurement, and to support the development of build plans for the Aberdeen City Region.

Whilst Project Gigabit develops, the previous **Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme** is paused for all new voucher projects in Scotland.



Department for
Science, Innovation,
& Technology



REACHING 100% AND SCOTTISH BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME

In April 2024, Scottish Government reached a landmark milestone, having delivered more than a million faster broadband connections across Scotland, backed by £1 billion of publicly-driven investment. The £600 million Reaching 100% (R100) is the current digital infrastructure programme being delivered by Scottish Government, with an overarching aim to ensure every premise in Scotland can access a superfast broadband connection of 30Mbps as an absolute minimum.

You can read more about this milestone on the Digital Scotland website at:

<https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com/news/news-and-case-studies/>

As of May 2024, nearly **5,000** premises across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire have been upgraded to a full-fibre broadband connection by Openreach, as part of the R100 programme. With 4,700 of these connections being in Aberdeenshire, it is positive to see that the programme is committing to target rural, more complex areas, to close the digital divide.

In the first months of 2024, premises around **Ellon, Insch, Dunecht, St. Cyrus, Pitcaple** and **Chapel of Garioch** are the latest to benefit from upgrades to gigabit capable full-fibre broadband.

With over **11,500** upgrades still to be delivered in the Region by **2028**, we will be seeing work continuing in **Laurencekirk, Kingswells, Tarves, Auchnagatt** and **Cruden Bay** in the coming months, with completion in these areas expected by the end of this year.

As the deployment of full-fibre progresses in the Region through the R100, the Digital Engagement Team plays a part in supporting this delivery. As the point of contact within the Local Authority, we work with colleagues in Openreach, to support in matters such as wayleaves and road closures, as well as carrying out community engagement in key areas.



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 cannot currently obtain superfast speeds, and are not included in the R100 rollout or commercial upgrade plans.

Across the Aberdeen City Region, over **900** of these vouchers have now been utilised, bringing superfast broadband connections to excluded premises. The Aberdeenshire Council Local Authority area continues to see the highest uptake and usage of the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, out of all Local Authorities in Scotland, with **863** vouchers used to date, representing an uptake rate of over **13%**.

This statistic highlights not only the need for better digital connectivity in the Region, but also the opportunity offered through alternative broadband solutions, such as:

- **4G Broadband**
- **Fixed Wireless Broadband**
- **Satellite Broadband.**

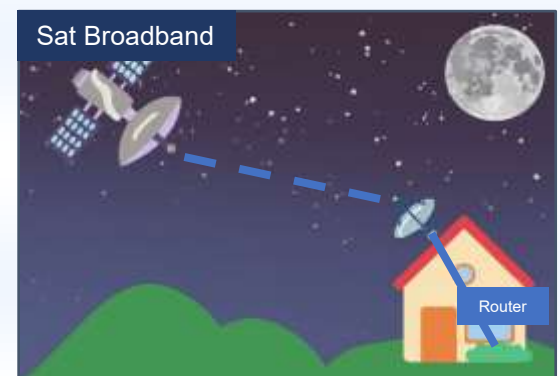
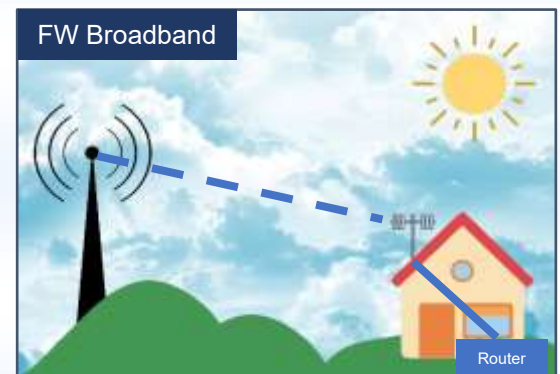
With nearly 7,000 vouchers still available across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, there remains a huge opportunity for residents, businesses and communities to use the R100 SBVS to install newer, faster broadband solutions.

The Digital Engagement Team is eager to support further usage of the R100 SBVS. We work closely with all the telecoms operators who can deploy solutions in the Region, and can offer specific, tailored advice on the best solutions for your property. For further support, or to simply ask questions, contact us at:

digitalengagement@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

or by phone at

01467 469322



THE LOCAL VIEW

World Horse Welfare, with a site base at Belwade Farm near Aboyne, is a charity whose vision is for every horse to be treated with respect, compassion and understanding. Their Aberdeenshire facilities are successful and are a key attraction in the area. However, like many rural businesses, this charity suffered from poor digital connectivity, affecting many of its day-to-day operations.



Served by Aboyne telephone exchange via FTTC infrastructure, World Horse Welfare sits at the end of a long stretch of copper wire connection, meaning fixed broadband speeds are very poor, unable to offer even 2Mbps. The charity was using 4G systems to run the functions it needed over the internet, but this had severe limitations.

After initially reaching out to Openreach to seek information and advice on getting improved connectivity, James (Head of IT at World Horse Welfare) was signposted to the Digital Engagement Team at Aberdeenshire Council, to get tailored, local support on finding a solution for the organisation.

With detailed investigation and analysis by the Digital Engagement Team, we were able to advise James that the good news is that full-fibre is coming, delivered through the Reaching 100% programme. The bad news is that it won't be until 2027.

To ensure the organisation had a better connectivity solution now, ahead of full-fibre improvements coming, James was provided with a detailed pack of information, explaining all the different solutions available to get better connectivity now. Enhanced 4G LTE systems were explained, with signposting to telecoms operators who could deploy this. Fixed Wireless Access broadband solutions were also promoted, with two local Wireless Internet Providers able to deploy bespoke solutions.

In the end, World Horse Welfare opted to utilise Low-Earth-Orbit (LEO) satellite broadband provider Starlink, to bring high speed broadband connectivity to this rural business.



“Connectivity is key to support our organisation’s work – without it we can’t communicate, take payment or access, update and share information. The Digital Engagement Team were able to provide detailed information on the plans for fibre at one of our sites, including a timeline for delivery. They also provided insight into wireless options that had been tried and tested in the area, allowing us to implement an interim solution. We’re now successfully using Low-Earth-Orbit satellite internet with a clear roadmap ahead for fibre when it arrives.” – James Rae, World Horse Welfare

MOVING TO DIGITAL VOICE – PSTN RETIREMENT



The telecoms industry is retiring the aged Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in January 2027, which means all phone call services will be moved over to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). Please note that this date has changed from 2025. 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 provides 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 2027.

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.org.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: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/digital-connectivity

MOBILE CONNECTIVITY AND THE SHARED RURAL NETWORK

Mobile broadband in the form of 4G & 5G connectivity is just as important as fixed broadband in the modern age, with most people engaging with the digital world through a smart phone or SIM device. Latest statistics from Ofcom through the **Connected Nations Spring 2024** update show us that Aberdeen City has ubiquitous 4G coverage, with 100% of premises able to access a 4G service from one or more Mobile Network Operators (MNO's), and 97% of premises having access to 4G from all the MNO's. Additionally, 98% of premises in the city can access a 5G service. Aberdeenshire, with its rural complexities, is actually doing well in mobile connectivity coverage, with over 99% of premises having predicted access to a 4G connection from one or more MNO's, and 59% of premises being able to access a 5G service.

In reality however, Ofcom's 'predicted' coverage doesn't give insight into the experience of users, as coverage doesn't necessarily mean fast and reliable, only that 4G or 5G is available. The Shared Rural Network (SRN) is a joint programme between UK Government and all four MNO's, which will deliver **reliable** mobile broadband to 95% of the UK, addressing the digital divide by improving 4G coverage in the areas that need it most. This programme has three streams of work:



- All four UK MNO's have committed to upgrading their existing networks to boost coverage in 'partial not-spots,' (meaning areas where only one MNO network is available), through improvements to infrastructure, and agreements between MNO's to share infrastructure.
- UK Government is funding the building of new mast infrastructure in 'total not-spots,' (meaning areas with no existing 4G coverage), which will be utilised by all MNO's in a shared infrastructure approach.
- The Home Office is working with the Shared Rural Network to explore opportunities to use Emergency Services Network masts, to provide public 4G from these sites.

The Aberdeen City Region has seen 12 applications to the planning service for mast upgrades and new telecoms masts, all as part of the Shared Rural Network. These sites are dotted across the Region, with most in the Marr area, which indicates the need for improved coverage in arguably the most rural part of the Region.

The Digital Engagement Team is keen to work together with Mobile Network Operators and developers, to realise the benefits brought by the Shared Rural Network. The Team is also keen to engage with communities and residents in areas where developments are planned, or where further developments are needed.

More information on the Shared Rural Network can be found on its website at www.srn.org.uk

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT TEAM JOURNAL

As we rapidly moved through the first few months of 2024, The Digital Engagement Team has been delivering work across various workstreams, further adding to its contribution to improving digital connectivity for the Aberdeen City Region.

As we closed off the financial year, the Team has a sense of pride in the support delivered in the past 12 months, with over **2,200** individual premises directly supported in matters relating to digital connectivity. Of all premises engaged with, there is a satisfaction rate of **96%** - meaning the vast majority of people supported have been supported to obtain a better broadband connection, or are comfortable with future improvements that are in plan. The Team has attended **54** individual public events, promoting the work being done in the Aberdeen City Region, and providing advice, information and support to a wide range of stakeholders.

Some other highlights of work being undertaken in the last quarter include:

- **Development and progression of a Fibre Community Partnership with Openreach for a small community in rural Deeside**
- **Supporting 5 other Local Authorities in Scotland to replicate the work and approach of Aberdeenshire's Digital Engagement Team**
- **Working with Robert Gordon's University, exploring avenues to expand on the incredible work being done in their Digital Innovation Lab**
- **Expanding on the work being done in the Digital Theme within the Aberdeen City Region Deal by developing new project and intervention ideas, and supporting the stakeholders contributing to the Deal**
- **Contributing to the development of Aberdeenshire Council's Community Resilience Plan, providing information and guidance in relation to the roles digital and telecoms play in resilience matters**
- **Liaising with Elected Representatives from all levels of Government providing support in constituency matters, whilst also building more weight in the case for lobbying for further investment to improve digital connectivity in the Region**
- **Contributing to a Scotland-wide working group, ensuring Local Authorities and their residents are aware of, and prepared for, the PSTN switch off and move to digital phonelines**
- **Furthering digital inclusion ambitions of both Aberdeenshire Council and the wider Aberdeen City Region, through promotion of the support offered by the Digital Engagement Team**
- **Exploring new and additional ways to enhance communication of information, and promote available support, in matters relating to digital connectivity**

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.



DIRECTORY

Supplier Name	Website	Full Fibre	Fixed Wireless	Fixed Mobile	Satellite
Assured Telecoms Ltd	www.assuredtelecoms.co.uk/	Yes			
BRDY	www.brdy.com/uk/				Yes
Converged Rural Broadband	www.crb.scot	Yes	Yes		
Cerberus Networks Ltd.	www.cerberusnetworks.co.uk/	Yes			
Converged Communication Solutions Ltd.	https://converged.co.uk/	Yes			Yes
External Reality Ltd.	www.externalreality.co.uk/	Yes		Yes	
Fibairo	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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Phone

01467 469322

Website

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