

# ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL:

Powering Tomorrow's World

<b>Report Name</b>	Digital Stakeholder Lead Post
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<b>Date of Report</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2024
<b>Governance</b>	City Region Deal Joint Committee

<b>1:</b>	<b>Purpose of the Report</b>
	<p>i. To seek approval to allocate funding from ACRD Digital theme to extend the post of Digital Stakeholder Lead post up to September 2026.</p>

<b>2:</b>	<b>Recommendations for Action</b>
	<p>It is recommended that the Joint Committee:</p> <p>i. Delegates authority to the Head of Finance, Aberdeenshire Council as Section 95 Officer of the Deal to allocate up to £130,000 from the existing Digital Theme Funding to resource the costs relating to the Digital Stakeholder Lead Officer post until end of September 2026.</p>

<b>3:</b>	<b>Summary of Key Information</b>
	<p>i. Funding was agreed previously by the Joint Committee to fund a Digital Engagement Team until June 2024. The intention is to extend the remaining post until September 2026 to allow for aggregation and demand stimulation activities across both Local Authority area resulting in more premises being able to access superfast and gigabit capable broadband services.</p> <p>ii. Since inception, the Digital Engagement Team has directly supported over 3,700 residents in matters relating to digital connectivity. Additionally, the team has attended 48 public events in the past year to provide advice, support and information directly to communities and stakeholders.</p> <p>iii. By extending the funding of the Digital Engagement Team, there are some key benefits this will bring to the Aberdeen City Region:</p>

3:	Summary of Key Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued &amp; increased uptake in the SBVS &amp; GBVS, resulting in more premises being able to access superfast and gigabit capable broadband services. With more premises able to benefit from superfast broadband, this will have direct economic impact for the region, allowing more businesses to be set-up and run rurally with good connectivity, and allow people to work from home. This will also play a part in growing the region as a desirable place to live, with connectivity being seen as an essential service for many.</li> <li>• Continued working relationships and collaboration with telecoms operators, to support them in growing their infrastructure networks and customer base. This will support local telecoms businesses to grow, increasing their revenue and customer base, whilst also providing an opportunity for these companies to grow their teams and employ local residents. This will also attract new businesses to the region, helping for jobs creation and market competition.</li> <li>• Further development of full-fibre (FTTP) projects in rural areas, where the prospect of commercial improvements is minimal. Development of these projects will help to make the City Region a leader in innovation and deployment in connectivity, and play a part in de-monopolising the infrastructure in the North East of Scotland.</li> <li>• Further lobbying capability to Scottish Government, UK Government, and telecoms industry. Continued funding of the Digital Engagement Team will give the City Region a unique ability to lobby both Scottish and UK Governments, emphasising the needs and opportunities of further investment and support in the North East of Scotland. No other Scottish Region currently has dedicated resource to achieve this.</li> <li>• Targeted business support in the realm of digital connectivity and productivity. In the coming year(s), the Digital Engagement Team are committed to conducting research and analysis to identify business needs in the region, in matters relating to digital connectivity, and other digital areas. Following this, we will be able to offer specialised business support for the Digital Sector, as well as digital support for traditional industries.</li> <li>• Continued support for residents and communities in matters relating to digital connectivity.</li> <li>• Dedicated resource to develop, or contribute to, strategies to improve digital connectivity for the region, by playing a part in Aberdeen City Region Deal projects and strategy.</li> <li>• Ability to focus on the 'Digital Economy' by providing dedicated resource to work with business and industry on improving the digital space and digital economy for commerce, thus allowing businesses to grow and bring further economic prosperity to the region. Additionally, a focus on digital economy allows us to support circular economy objectives, as if people are able to live and work comfortably in rural areas, with good connectivity, money and investment will stay local.</li> </ul>	

**3:** Summary of Key Information

- Capacity to explore opportunity to secure additional external funding streams, to develop workstreams and projects focussed on: the digital economy; digital inclusion; digital sector; etc.

Table 1 – Evidence of success of DET to date.

<i>Promotion of Solutions</i>	<i>Operator Engagement</i>	<i>Community Engagement</i>	<i>Added Value</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aberdeenshire now has the highest uptake of the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) in Scotland, with 902 vouchers utilised, equating to a <b>12.2%</b> uptake – this is significantly above the whole of Scotland which is at 3.4%.</li> <li>• DET has successfully lobbied and influenced Scottish Government in making improvements and adaptations to aspects of the R100 Programme.</li> <li>• DET has facilitated some of the R100 build programme, supporting in matters related to wayleaves, road closures, and public engagement.</li> <li>• Examples of SBVS and R100 success in the City Region have been highlighted at a national level, showcasing the benefits of the approach developed by the DET.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an ‘Operators Forum’ working with all telecoms operators in the Region.</li> <li>• Supporting Telecoms Operators to grow their networks and business through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Exploring use of Council Assets &amp; street furniture.</li> <li>○ Working with Grampian Assessors to look at Business rates on infrastructure.</li> <li>○ Supporting operators to benefit from the Full-Fibre Charter.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• DET has developed working relationship with Openreach as the wholesale operator and R100 contractor.</li> <li>• DET has successfully attracted numerous telecoms operators to the Aberdeen City Region, increasing the number of active operators from 9 to <b>35</b>, increasing the connectivity options for the region.</li> <li>• DET has facilitated the development of <b>8</b> externally funded full-fibre broadband projects in the Region, with several key telecoms companies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET has handled 781 live enquiries from members of the public, businesses, and community representatives.</li> <li>• DET has directly supported over <b>3,500</b> premises in matters relating to digital connectivity.</li> <li>• DET has organised or attended 48 community meetings, in partnership with Community Councils and other community groups.</li> <li>• DET works closely with Elected Members (Councillors; MSP’s; MP’s) handling public queries and concerns around digital connectivity.</li> <li>• DET has received a <b>4.5/5</b> rating in quality of support from residents, from a survey pool of 200 residents.</li> <li>• DET is actively working with Scottish Land &amp; Estates, providing advice and support for owners of rural Estates in digital connectivity matters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET provides dedicated resource for the City Region in matters relating to digital connectivity.</li> <li>• DET has been able to lobby Scottish Government on programmes, to influence the R100 and SBVS programmes to the benefit of the City Region.</li> <li>• DET is leading the development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy for Aberdeenshire Council.</li> <li>• DET is working with National Trust to find connectivity solutions for NTS properties.</li> <li>• DET contributes to Cairngorms National Park Digital Steering Group &amp; Digital Strategy.</li> <li>• DET Model has been highlighted as a notable success by other LA’s and Scottish Government.</li> <li>• DET has played a role in the continuing gap analysis in connectivity of the region, and the deployment of CRD funds for 5G</li> </ul>

3: Summary of Key Information		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET has supported Scottish Government colleagues to expand the number of SBVS approved operators and create slicker voucher usage processes for operators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET is developing a plan for business support, to identify needs of businesses in the region in matters relating to digital connectivity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Place projects.</li> <li>• DET has contributed to Aberdeenshire Council's resilience strategies in relation to power and telecoms.</li> <li>• DET is contributing to the Local Development Plan.</li> </ul>

4: Finance and Risk	
<p>i. The funding for the costs incurred will be met from the Aberdeen City Region Deal subject to agreement by Committee</p>	