



THINK YOU KNOW DONCASTER? *THINK AGAIN*

If you are thinking about investment,
Doncaster is the place and now is the time.



Doncaster
Metropolitan Borough Council

‘We are looking to exploit all our assets to drive economic growth and this includes pushing for a rail academy that will support and enhance a core business sector.’

Ros Jones, Doncaster’s third directly-elected mayor, personifies the can-do approach of the town in which she was born and bred



Mayor means business

Ros Jones, Doncaster’s third directly-elected mayor, personifies the no-nonsense, can-do attitude of the borough in which she was born and bred.

‘This is a place where we don’t just talk about things, we get them done,’ explained the former accountant, in the wake of a recent survey by *fDi Intelligence Magazine* that placed Doncaster among the top 10 European cities of the future for foreign direct investment.

She and Jo Miller, ex-deputy chief executive of the Local Government Association and a lawyer by training, form the only all-female mayor and chief executive leadership partnership in the country. ‘Working as a team with the cabinet and the rest of the authority, we are dedicated to tackling problems where they exist, exploiting opportunities to the maximum and playing to our strengths in order to make Doncaster a truly great place to live, learn, work, invest in and do business from,’ said the Labour directly-elected mayor.

‘I see my role as very much out there, getting new investment in and helping out existing businesses in every way I can.’

This includes monthly fact-finding visits to local firms to find out more about what they are doing and what extra help they may need to succeed.

‘When you are making decisions you have to touch them and feel them on the ground. That is the only way in which you will find out whether they are working, or whether you need to go faster or slower. It is about embedding our great ambition for the borough in reality.’

Unique three-year budget gives stability

Mayor Jones began her term last May and now has council-approved financial plans through to 2017. They provide a balanced budget for the next 12 months and a clear strategy to address the £109 million budget gap facing the council over the next three years.

The council will also spend £339 million on infrastructure over the period, including investment in education, housing, tourism and leisure, to keep Doncaster’s strong ambitions on track.

‘The financial plans give some stability in what are rocky times for local councils, particularly in the north,’ Ros Jones explained. ‘Government cuts mean we will have 50% less to spend in 2017 than we had in 2010, taking account of inflation. You cannot achieve savings like that in one-year tranches; you have got to plan for the medium and long term, and we have.’

Pulling in the right direction

Ros Jones was keen to show how, under her tutelage, decision-making across the council had been transformed. ‘To move Doncaster forward at pace we need to make timely decisions that are in the best interests of the town, its residents and its businesses.’

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s review of council size is a case in point. ‘The recommendation we made to the Boundary Commission about reducing the size of the council from 63 to 54 councillors was a real cross-party effort and it shows that everyone is pulling together for the common good.’ In terms of doing what is right for Doncaster, the mayor, her cabinet and the council have come a long way in a short space of time.

Planning for growth

Delivering jobs and growth are a top priority for Ros

Jones and key to Doncaster’s future success.

She emphasised the borough’s location in the geographical centre of the UK as a key advantage in attracting new jobs. ‘The Romans got it right when they chose Doncaster as one of their earliest auxiliary forts,’ she commented. The borough today is on the main East Coast railway line, close to motorways heading north, south, east and west, with its own international airport and the Humber ports on its doorstep.

‘All this puts us within touching distance of markets across the world – we are 90 minutes from central London with 44 services a day, for example – and we exploit this connectivity to the full,’ she enthused. ‘It is a huge draw for companies and is why we have such a strong logistics sector.’

The council’s economic-growth plan, meanwhile, emphasises business growth, skills and harnessing Doncaster’s geographical, social and economic assets.

Chief executive Jo Miller can easily back up her claim that Doncaster is all about glamour and innovation.

‘Doncaster is an intriguing and interesting mix. We have a rich, strong history that has put us on the map for our engineering and design prowess. Coupled with that is a steely determination to take the here and now and create a positive and dynamic future built on innovating and taking on challenges. We certainly have the infrastructure, inward-investment opportunities and attractive environment to be able to do that, ‘The digital transformation is here and we are going to make the most of it’ she insisted.

‘This place was never about flat caps and whippets. Mallard, which was designed, built and maintained in Doncaster, still holds the official speed record for a steam locomotive at 126mph. Doncaster built thoroughbred locomotives and last year welcomed Mallard home during the hugely popular St Leger Festival Week. Today’s Doncaster builds on that tradition as home to some of the world’s most advanced railway engineering and technology and is determined to be home to much more innovation – both in industry and technology and public service, and as a hothouse for skills and training.’

Growth, glamour, innovation... and a big heart to match!

Embracing change to move forward

This forward-thinking approach is becoming engrained into the culture of the council and Doncaster itself.

‘We have a confidence that is not born from arrogance,’ she commented, referring to the fact that the council is still monitored by a recovery board set up by communities secretary Eric Pickles following an Audit Commission report in 2010 that criticised the way the council was run.

‘We know where we have come from. We are still subject to government intervention, albeit very light touch these days. But we absolutely know where we want to go and believe we have the capacity and capability to do it. All of that is grounded on our experience of the last few years. Since recovery started the council has met



- Doncaster's £4 billion economy already makes it the second largest after Sheffield in the city region.
- More than 10,000 new private-sector jobs will be created in the borough over the next five years, driven partly by key development projects.
- Anti-social behaviour has fallen by 35.7% in the last three years
- Business confidence and sales are back to pre-recession levels while growth of up to 20% is projected by 2020.
- More than 300 apprenticeships have been instigated by the council in less than a year.

It recognises the need to increase start-ups, back the borough's 6,400 existing businesses – including such household names as Amazon, BAE, BT, Ikea, Next and Thales – and support such growth sectors as manufacturing, engineering, construction, leisure, tourism and sport, and financial and business services.

Future developments

More than 10,000 people are employed in engineering in Doncaster. The mayor sees this sector as having a key role in the borough's future prosperity. Railway engineering, in particular, is not only part of the borough's past, but also its present and future. The headquarters of a number of major national and international rail companies, it has particular skills in high-speed rail which could position it well to win significant contracts on the government's planned £50 billion High Speed 2 rail link



from London to Birmingham and then on to Manchester and Leeds. Indeed a new partnership has been created and is behind the bid to develop an academy to train the next generation of skilled rail engineers. Create (the Centre for Rail Engineering and Technical Excellence) wants to bring the national High Speed Rail College (HSRC) to Lakeside Campus, Doncaster.

'We are looking to exploit all our assets to drive economic growth and this includes pushing for a rail academy that will support and enhance a core business sector,' said Ros Jones. 'All in all, I am a responsible mayor dealing with the cuts we have to make in a responsible manner,' she concluded. 'But that is only one part of the story. The other is regeneration. I want to create the ethos and infrastructure that will make everyone's life that little bit better in what promises to be an exciting future for the borough.'



or surpassed every test. Everyone who comes here these days – including peers reviewing both health and social care and integrated public health – tells me we are no different from any other council and where we are, we stand out in a good way.'

Making the council and its services easier to access is behind its drive to do more things online and maximise modern technology, including social media. It is transforming how it offers services to local people through digital innovation. 'We are doing more business that way – the mayor, members and officers. The digital

transformation is here and we are going to make the most of it.'

Jo Miller highlighted the £24 million Better Care Fund, which will be used as 'a kick-starter and catalyst' as an example of innovative thinking to remove the barriers to working across health and social care. 'There should be just one key to the door for services,' she explained, 'so that Doncaster residents do not see organisations but people who can help them to make their lives the best they can be.'

'We have too often focused on providing things to people rather than thinking about what people can do for themselves. We are reimagining our communities as assets rather than recipients of services and encouraging them to take a more active role.'

The response has been encouraging with, for example, more communities running their local library. 'We have got 610 registered library volunteers in the borough who could be running up to 20 out of our 24 libraries – this is community partnership working in action.'

Insisting that Doncaster Council had come a long way and would embrace even more change in the years ahead, she continued: 'There is no drawbridge mentality here. We are not precious about who delivers services but that they should be delivered well. We are increasingly an enabler and commissioner of services to make them

the best they can be. And we are a good partner; others would be envious of a lot of the co-operation that is happening in Doncaster today.'

Doncaster delivers

Jo Miller first came to the borough as interim chief executive for three months in 2010, but 'fell in love with the place and its endless sense of possibility'.

She explained: 'Our sense of priority is stronger than ever: we want our communities to thrive, create the right climate for economic growth and deliver modern value-for-money services with a strong sense of partnership. We have come a long way. Here we are now, in a new headquarters that is costing less money, with a three-year budget, a plan to transform how we integrate health and social care and a new children's trust, the first in the country, that we are bringing into existence. We are working with our education partners to improve people's skills and with the police to reduce crime. We can see how we would like Doncaster to be in the next five, 10 and 15 years and have a plan to make that vision real.'

'We have a thoroughly modern mayor wanting to thoroughly modernise the borough, both through the council and the entire Team Doncaster. This is a big place with a big heart and an absolute focus on economic growth and serving its people well,' she concluded.



Booming borough looks to even brighter times

You have only to look at the range of 'shovel-ready' opportunities across the borough to recognise that Doncaster is alive with opportunity, says Mayor Ros Jones.

'There are so many regeneration and infrastructure projects bringing significant levels of inward investment into the borough and growing the economy,' she continued.

A prime example is the UK's largest inland port and logistics complex, due to open in Doncaster early next year and expected to create around 5,500 jobs.

The £400 million iPort, which has been backed by global investor Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan (Hoopp), will comprise a national and international rail-freight terminal and more than 6 million square feet of quality warehousing connected by rail to all major UK ports and the Channel tunnel.

'As one of the top 100 pension funds in the world, Hoopp's commitment to Verdion's iPort development is a real feather in our cap. Overseas investment in projects like this justifies our optimism for the future,' explained Mayor Jones.

On the road to growth

A key project is the £56 million Farrrs link (Finningley and Rossington Regeneration Route Scheme) which will improve access to key sites in the south of Doncaster, including both iPort and Doncaster's international airport. The latter will itself become an enterprise zone and so offer 'a fantastic opportunity to develop 100 acres of freehold business park,' Scott Cardwell, Doncaster

Council's assistant director of development, said.

'The road link will clearly benefit the airport by doubling the number of large population centres within a 30-minute drive. It will lever in around £1.7 billion of private investment, creating around 20,000 jobs and 5,000 new homes. It is a game-changer for Doncaster and shows just what can be delivered when the public and private sectors work together. This is a true partnership.'

Doncaster's Southern Gateway Improvement Scheme was recently completed and made the full length of the A6182, from junction 3 of the M18 into Doncaster town centre, a dual carriage way. This important infrastructure project has already unlocked development opportunities including a £250million housing project which is seeing 1,500 new homes being built at Carr Lodge.

'Our track record for making things happen is second to none. We devise schemes, organise funding, pull partners together and deliver,' commented Mayor Jones.

Innovative carbon-capture plans

The wide-ranging DN7 initiative, meanwhile, is helping to regenerate areas in the north of the borough. 'We have a site there that has been granted planning permission for a power station,' Scott Cardwell explained. 'It will burn coal from the neighbouring colliery, capture the emissions and pipe them out to the North Sea to extract oil from fissures previously considered depleted.'

'Among the world's most advanced carbon-capture

projects, it has already won significant European Union money and now needs UK government backing.'

Investment in the plant will total £3 billion, creating up to 2,000 jobs during construction and work for 200 people when completed.

Other aspects of DN7 include a link road to the M18 that will open up more than 41 hectares of development land and help to create some 6,000 jobs. Another 1,200 homes will be constructed there, leading to 'a real transformation of the area.'

Town-centre transformation

Some £300 million of regeneration is under way in the town centre, too. The Civic and Cultural Quarter covers around a quarter of Doncaster's urban centre and is being delivered by the council and its private-sector partner, Muse Developments. A new town square and two imposing buildings, the new five-storey civic offices and the Cast theatre, are at its heart, with housing and other developments complementing the scheme.

The civic offices house around 1,600 employees and most of the council's services on one site. They have provided a platform for the council to modernise its service delivery. The building, which opened last year, incorporates such environmental features as a planted roof that harvests rain-water. Its bright, multi-colour exterior includes materials that change colour with changes in the light.

Cast is a £20 million performance venue that includes a 620-seat main auditorium and a second space that can accommodate up to 400 spectators. Opened last



... ahead

year, it hosts theatre, music, dance and comedy. Mayor Jones commented: 'The venue has been a great success, increasing Doncaster's cultural offer. Attendance figures are high and the venue has received very positive national press.' The council is working with a cinema operator and restaurateurs who are interested in setting up in Sir Nigel Gresley Square.

Regeneration of the Civic and Cultural Quarter is also having an effect on the near-by 1960s Waterdale shopping precinct, which was sold at auction for more than £1 million above the guide price. 'It shows the impact this project is having in the town centre,' enthused Scott Cardwell.

The Waterfront project, at the northern gateway, occupies a further 25% of the town-centre area. 'At 46 hectares it is the UK's largest brown-field water-front development site,' said Scott Cardwell. 'It already houses Doncaster College's £70 million campus, a marina and a recently completed access road that has opened the site for commercial, residential and leisure developments.'

Prestigious site

Some 500 high-quality homes, offices, leisure facilities and shops surround a 20-hectare man-made lake at the Lakeside development, only 1.5 miles from the town centre. 'This is among the north's most prestigious mixed-use development sites,' said Scott Cardwell. 'Some 10,000 employees are already on-site.'

Finally, the Professional Golfers' Association European Tour hopes to develop a venue – one of only 25 in the world – at Rossington Hall, Doncaster. The project would include an international-tournament-quality 18-hole golf course lined by luxury homes.

'Doncaster is already home to a world-class horse-racing venue and international golf would further enhance our reputation for quality sport,' said Mayor Jones. 'It could be a real game-changer for us.'

Pointing out that the borough plans to build around 18,500 new homes over the next 15 years and is allocating some 600 hectares of land to employment, she concluded; 'Our wealth of development opportunities gives us a unique opportunity to offer the market plenty of choice and drive our development forward.'

'We have got an enabling attitude, a great track record of delivery and an extraordinarily bright future ahead of us.'



Animal magic: seeing is believing!



Almost half a million people came to marvel at Doncaster's newest and most unusual attraction last year – a wildlife park. Seeing is believing when you think that three prides of lions now call Doncaster their home.

Yorkshire Wildlife Park claims to be Britain's first walk-through safari, giving visitors the chance to get close to some of the most fascinating of animals. There are even plans to bring a polar bear to the park – a first for England.

Yorkshire Wildlife Park is just one of the attractions that helps Doncaster to attract more day-trippers than Bath, Oxford, Cambridge, Windsor and Stratford-upon-Avon, according to Visit England, the country's national tourist board.

Many of the visitors are attracted by Doncaster's acclaimed racecourse. 'We have wrapped a 10-day borough-wide cultural event around the four-day St Leger Festival which includes the St Leger – the oldest classic horse-race in the world first raced for in 1776,' explained Councillor Bob Johnson, cabinet member for regeneration, growth and tourism.



Airport reaches high

There is plenty to attract the history-buffs, too. Parts of the original Roman wall remain, there is Saxon-church architecture, Norman castles at Conisbrough (the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*) and Tickhill, a wealth of Georgian and Regency architecture and a fine Minster that dominates the town centre.

'We even have a Mansion House where people can now tie the knot,' said Councillor Johnson. 'Dating from 1749, it is one of only three surviving examples in England and houses an impressive art display.'

Doncaster's history as a market town dates back to Roman times. Today's award-winning market boasts around 400 shops, stalls and stands and, with significant investment under way, it hopes to retain its place as one of the finest traditional markets in the country.

'All in all there is more than enough to surprise and delight the visitor to Doncaster,' Councillor Johnson concluded. 'There is so much to see and do here – truly something for everyone.'

- The borough has around 12.3 million day-trippers a year, worth £224 million to the local economy.
- Visitor numbers to Doncaster attractions have increased by 13% in the last year, while they have fallen 1% nationally.
- The 10-day St Leger Festival Week included more than 300 events across the borough, worth some £12.5 million to the local economy.
- Yorkshire Wildlife Park welcomed 435,000 visitors last year.
- In the last year, English Heritage properties in Doncaster have benefited from £2 million of investment.

Robin Hood Airport Doncaster Sheffi ld provides flights to more than 30 destinations around the world for some 750,000 passengers each year. With a 2,893-metre runway, it is capable of handling the world's largest aircraft. Doncaster Sheffield Airport is seeing increased passenger and cargo figures year-on-year. These are set to be boosted further with the completion of the new Farris link road to the motorway network.

This is the place and now is the time



Few places in Britain can come close to Doncaster in terms of major regeneration projects delivered over the past 10 years and those in the pipeline, says a Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership board member and local business man.

Nigel Brewster, a partner in Brewster Pratap Recruitment Group, commented: 'The borough has punched well above its weight over the last decade and now has one of the most attractive offers to business. In terms of UK inward investment destinations it has to be taken seriously.'

This is evident from the list of major corporations that have decided to put down roots in the area and from the attractive mix of land and labour availability. A business-friendly mayor and council have helped, too. It is little wonder that the number of inward-investment inquiries continues to increase and Doncaster has such a strong forward pipeline of business investment.

Jon Whiteley, who has been active in the Enterprising Doncaster partnership and is chief executive of the ProAktive group of companies that specialises in risk management and financial advice, said: 'Doncaster has

'If you are thinking about investment, Doncaster is the place and now is the time.'

never been better placed for business growth. We have always had the land availability and connectivity that most towns dream of.

'The cocktail of the Farrs link road, iPort and enterprise zone will bring investment to the town and kick-start real growth in wealth and employment. It should also be a catalyst to making the most of our international airport.

'We are already witnessing early signs of what this will bring with the success of the racecourse, wildlife

park and other imminent investment. Once this really takes off it will help to cement the reputation of Doncaster as the place in which businesses can flourish. The benefits will ripple out across the borough.

'I have never been more optimistic about the future of Doncaster as a business destination.'

Phil Harris, Doncaster Chamber of Commerce chief executive, said: 'Businesses tell us that our hard-working and reliable workforce is among the best in the country. Companies have located here because of that and we are home to some world-beating firms.

'We see high levels of confidence in Doncaster and are really set to grow. You can feel the optimism. We have the assets, the will and the people.

'If you are thinking about investment, Doncaster is the place and now is the time.'

To find out more about the opportunities Doncaster offers visit www.businessdoncaster.com or call 01302 735555





Read all about it: library volunteers lead the way

One of the most significant chapters in the history of libraries run by local volunteers was written more than two years ago in Doncaster, when community champions took over managing on a day-to-day basis half the borough's 24 libraries.

'The first moves were dictated by the desire to keep the libraries open despite budget pressures, but lots of other advantages have arisen since then,' said Karen Johnson, assistant director, communities.

'There are even more community activities in the libraries these days – some of them have community cafés, for example – and they are much more vibrant places to be,' she explained.

The council plans to expand the initiative to up to eight more libraries. Some 300 potential new volunteers have registered an interest during recent consultations on the proposals. 'The response has been incredible – demonstrating again the desire of people from across the borough to be involved,' Karen Johnson enthused.

'The council gives full training to any volunteers, including in health and safety, using the stock and resources, and library databases. The staffed and community-managed libraries are part of the same network with the staffed libraries supporting the development of community management through on-going support on stock supplies and maintenance, library events and activities and promotion.'

Councillor Joe Blackham, cabinet member for communities said: 'Hundreds of selfless people give up their time to do their bit for their local neighbourhoods, boost their skills, further their career or meet new people.' As elected members we are striving to tap into this enthusiasm to encourage even more people to come forward to help to run and use these facilities so they become real community assets.'

More than 80 volunteers make Bawtry Community Library a warm and friendly place for its 300-or-so weekly visitors. It opens six days a week and, like many of the other volunteer libraries, is run by a board, consisting of 14 trustees, including three council ward members. While the volunteers give their time for free, the overheads and books are still paid for by the council.

George Spencer, who chairs the board, said: 'It took some time to learn the ropes for us all but it is extremely rewarding.' Stainforth Community Library, in an area of high unemployment, focuses on local youth with clubs covering everything from arts and craft to films and chess. Information-technology sessions help young adults to get on the career ladder.

Stuart Bolton, the library's treasurer and director, leads a team of more than 60 volunteers. 'We are like one big happy family,' he said. 'It is a place to socialise – a hub where people can come for all types of advice and information. We have links across Doncaster and I get great pride in helping people and the library to be a focal point of the community.'



Community policing pays off

The burglary of people's homes is at its lowest for more than 40 years, vehicle crime is down to 1990 levels and criminal damage is at its lowest level since 1992 following the success of the Safer Stronger Doncaster Partnership.

It brings together the police, council, local National Health Service and other public, private and voluntary-sector bodies to reduce crime and disorder, improve people's quality of life and contribute to the regeneration of Doncaster.

Peter Norman, police superintendent for partnerships and neighbourhoods, said: 'We are successfully working with the community to identify the issues that matter most to residents – bringing together agencies with an interest in community safety, community cohesion and co-ordinating efforts to reduce crime across the borough. We have an excellent relationship with agreed goals and values. Our priority – by using our shared resources in the most cost-effective way – is to make Doncaster a safer place in which to live and work.'

'Our Team Doncaster approach involves using the strengths and areas of expertise of all partners to develop a broader range of services to address the needs of individuals, families and communities.'

'Strong leadership and governance mean that our priorities and performance are regularly reviewed to ensure that our commissioning, management and delivery arrangements are innovative, effective and sustainable.'

Doctors put patients in touch with better health

The group controlling Doncaster's £415 million National Health Service budget is keen to involve as many as possible in decision-making – a clear demonstration of the Team Doncaster approach to delivering health and social care.

NHS Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has created a public-membership scheme named In Touch for local people who care about the NHS and would like to have a say about its services now and in the future.

'I am delighted to see and be part of the changes taking place as Team Doncaster starts to grow into this role,' said Dr Nick Tupper, clinical-commissioning group chairman. 'We are building a firm foundation on which to forge solid links across local organisations that have a common vision. There is a real unity and commitment to making improvements. In our case that means helping to create a healthier Doncaster.'

'We know where we are and where we are going and although we still have a lot to do health-wise we are starting to see the green shoots of success. Lives are being saved. People with cancer are being diagnosed and treated quicker so they can beat the disease and we are making improvements to the services we organise and pay for after listening to patients and acting on what they tell us.'

'The new Better Care Fund is bringing together local health and social-care budgets so we can develop better community-based services that will help people to maintain independent living and avoid being admitted to hospital. Local GPs are



driving forward improvements to the way that health services are delivered locally after listening and talking to thousands of patients every week. We are investing in different ways of providing care, such as using new technology to enhance the excellent skills of local clinicians,' added Dr Tupper.

Meanwhile, Yorkshire Wildlife Park employees worked with the CCG on awareness-raising dementia-friends training to help more than 20 staff to understand what it is like to live with the disease.

Dr Ayesha Zafar, who has special responsibility in the clinical-commissioning group for dementia care, said: 'It is the simple things that can make a difference, such as being aware and considerate when people are having difficulty communicating

what they want to buy in the café or shop.'

'Organisations across Doncaster are working together to make the borough dementia-friendly and businesses like the wildlife park are playing a supportive role in helping us.'

In another initiative, the council's public-health team and partners including Doncaster Rovers Football Club are employing modern technology to encourage physical activity and the use of green space at Lakeside. Using mobile-device quick-response codes on posts around the lake, visitors upload data like exercise videos while they enjoy a healthier lifestyle.

A Cancer Buddies scheme, supported by Macmillan Cancer Support, enables volunteers who have been touched by cancer to share their experiences and support each other.

Councillor Pat Knight, cabinet member for health and adult social care, said: 'This service is available to anyone in the borough, whether they are cancer patients, survivors or have a loved one with cancer.'

'Cancer touches many people's lives and the big strength of this scheme is the fact that it is driven by volunteers in our communities who have a deep understanding of what people are going through so they can help them to feel less like they are on their own and more confident about coping with the situation they are in.'

Doncaster has more than 10,000 cancer survivors and, with new treatments, the number of people surviving a cancer diagnosis is anticipated to double by 2030.

‘The council has shown considerable foresight in thinking through how this might prove not only to be a potential national model for children’s services but also how it might help with the delivery of other services in Doncaster itself.’

Colin Hilton, who chairs the Doncaster Children’s Services Trust Board



Step by step to better children’s services

Partnership working has helped to bring about a step change in children’s services in Doncaster over the last 10-12 months.

The council has commissioned with the Department for Education an independent children’s trust with a board comprising both local members not only from the council itself but also from the police and health sectors as well as national expert non-executive directors. Doncaster Children’s Services Trust seeks to bring about improvements principally by promoting partnerships and joint commissioning for children and young people’s social care and safeguarding services. It came into being in shadow form on 1 April and is working towards becoming operational from October 2014.

The changes follow the emergence, in 2008, of serious failings in the council’s children’s services department. They included the deaths of seven children who had been neglected or abused. The DfE intervened in 2009 and last summer the Secretary of State for Education agreed to an independent trust model to improve and deliver safeguarding services.

Experienced team

Two enormously experienced people are leading the reforms. Colin Hilton, former director of the Children’s Improvement Board and ex-Liverpool City Council chief executive, was appointed to chair the



trust in February. And Eleanor Brazil, interim deputy director of children and families services at Haringey Council following the death of Baby P, became the council’s director of children and young people’s service last July. She had previously worked as Director of Children’s Services at Leeds, Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent city councils.

Eleanor Brazil explained that the desire to progress and improve at pace lies at the centre of the council’s improvement programme. She said: ‘We have not waited for the trust to come into existence to start the necessary improvements.’ They include:

- Improving recruitment – particularly of experienced social workers – and relying less on agency staff.
- Creating advanced practitioners – experienced social workers who can help to manage complex cases.
- Establishing a more supportive culture for social workers and improving staff morale.
- Investing more in professional development and ‘growing one’s own’ talent.
- Providing early help for families and getting the basics right
- Reducing the cost of placements for children in care. ‘One centres on whether a child needs to be in care in the first place. We are also putting more emphasis on recruiting in-house foster-carers because we want to keep children close to home. We want to encourage Doncaster carers to come forward so we do not have to place so many children with fostering agencies,’ explained Eleanor Brazil.
- Ensuring that children’s centres and the Youth Service focus on children with the greatest need.
- Improving relationships with the police, schools and health. ‘Our partners have seen an improvement in leadership and have responded positively,’ she continued.
- Upgrading information-technology systems.

Eleanor Brazil continued: ‘We know there are things we need to do better. We think the trust will give a real focus to that. If you want to bring in a different skill mix or do other things differently it is much easier through a different kind of organisation.’

Grasping the reform agenda

Colin Hilton explained: ‘If all those improvements had not been carried out the trust would have a very different focus from today’s. It would be about trying to restore the foundations of the building whereas now, while we are not yet into *Grand Designs* territory, we are certainly aspiring to construct something that, over time, is going to emerge as a model of social-work practice.’

‘The trust was born of difficult circumstances but the council grasped the reform agenda from day one. The council retains statutory responsibility for children’s social care while the trust works to deliver those services as innovatively, practically and efficiently as possible.’

‘It has some of the hallmarks people would easily recognise around local government – a strong client focus, a performance culture owned by the workforce and leadership with a clear vision but it also has the freedom and flexibility an independent trust can bring to focus more exclusively on the work in hand and be innovative in its approach.’

‘There is no way that you could create this kind of model without it being very heavily involved with, and supporting local partnerships. And the council is a key partner. Children’s social care is an area that – if you are not part of the local community and local partnerships and playing alongside the council – simply does not work, whether you are doing your best for children in care or at the front door of child protection.’

‘The council has shown considerable foresight in thinking through how this might prove not only to be a potential national model for children’s services but also how it might help with the delivery of other services in Doncaster itself.’

‘For example, there is quite a lot of discussion at regional and sub-regional levels around learning and skills and demonstrating that young people can play a full role in what could be a surge in economic growth in this part of the world.’

Doncaster chief executive Jo Miller said: ‘The great thing for us about the children’s trust is that we know our families and what needs to look different. Rather than have something imposed by Whitehall we wanted to enable the creation of a strongly-focused new player that can deliver that as part of Team Doncaster.’