

Avizon Young strikes £200m deal to buy GVA

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Swedish private equity firm EQT has struck a deal to sell UK property advisory firm GVA for around £200m.

It has agreed a sale to acquisitive Canadian firm Avizon Young. Details were finalised by GVA's board on Wednesday and the news was announced to staff the following morning. The deal is anticipated to close in the first quarter of next year.

Avizon Young is led in the UK by principal and managing director Jason Sibrhorpe. He was previously GVA's head of transactions and capital markets until 2016, when he took up his current role.

GVA is led by chief executive Gerry Hughes, who has been

with the business since 1995 and has led it since 2014.

EQT appointed Bank of America Merrill Lynch to explore a market testing exercise for GVA in May. It also held discussions with Cushman & Wakefield over a possible deal.

However, EQT had been wanting to progress a deal quickly whereas the newly listed Cushman had been cautious about making such a major move for a UK firm ahead of the country's scheduled departure from the European Union in March.

Since entering the UK market in 2014, Avizon Young has expanded through a series of acquisitions including Jorden Salata, North Rae Sanders, WHR Property Consultants and, most

recently, Wilkinson Williams.

All of these deals will be eclipsed by the GVA acquisition. The current Avizon Young UK team totals just over 100,

whereas GVA employs around 1,500 staff.

Avizon Young has five UK offices located in Coventry, Manchester, Thames Valley and two in London. GVA has 12 in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as two in London.

Avizon Young has traditionally bought firms through issuing shares in the parent company. However, in July Canadian fund manager Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec made a \$250m (£190m) preferred

equity investment into the company.

As a result chairman and chief executive Mark Rose, said it had "one of the sector's largest war chests" and that he was looking to buy in \$1bn of turnover through acquisitions globally – half in the US, with the majority of the balance in the UK and the rest of Europe.

EQT bought the building and services division of Bilfinger, which also included a facilities management and construction arm as well as GVA, in 2016 for £1.2bn (£1bn).

As part of that deal an agreement was made in which Bilfinger would receive 49% of any subsequent sale of GVA.

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