



In conversation

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CEO  
Valley House  
and  
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SASC

Before meeting SASC, we were reliant on registered providers and private landlords to source accommodation and it often wasn’t right for our service user groups in terms of schools, transport links, or quality. We also weren’t particularly attractive to private landlords. They stereotyped our service user groups and, if they could rent to other people, the general public, they would choose to do that. Additionally, some registered providers are pulling back from leasing their properties to organisations like **Valley House** because of increased demand on them.

But we had obligations in terms of our contracts with the local authority, so we decided to look at trying to buy our own properties. We realised it was going to be a lot of money – way more than our annual turnover – but we believed it was something we had to do to move forward. SASC went through a very long due diligence process that allowed me to get our board to a place where they felt safe to take on this.

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And it means that we now own 22 properties in areas that we want them to be in. It has been a journey. You start off thinking that you just want to borrow money, then you realise there are the challenges that sit behind that in terms of knowledge and skills you need. So, we’re going through a process of upskilling so we can be the very best landlord.

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The loan hasn’t yet increased our capacity in terms of the contracts that we’ve currently got. But what it does mean going forward is that when a contract tender goes out, we are able to say that we have our own properties and have the housing management expertise. This will be beneficial in terms of looking for additional funding going forward for services.

In our SASH properties we are completely responsible for all the maintenance, rather than in our rentals where we are reliant on the landlord. We have an ongoing issue with one property where there is mould in the bathroom. The Registered Provider has come and done a bit of work here and

there but it has been going on for six months and to me that’s unacceptable.

For our owned properties we’ve got external contractors and work gets done a whole lot quicker and to a better standard, with better communication with us than we have with our other landlords.

I’ve just finished writing our new strategic plan, and within that there’s the commitment to write an environmental sustainability strategy aligning with the green agenda, which will address all the regulations and standards.

My advice to new borrowers is to think about the green agenda and how their strategies speak to that.

LJ Winterburn, CEO  
Valley House



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