

## Palma Black Consulting Ltd.

### Community Engagement Consultant

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Role: Community Engagement Consultant

Period: Oct 2016 - Mar 2017

Organisation: Communities First

Location: London Borough of Croydon,  
Addington

Assignment: Community consultation and engagement exercises were conducted in New Addington between October 2016 and March 2017, the purpose of which was to:

- a. To ascertain whether there is community support for the establishment of a new secondary school in New Addington.
- b. To understand the wider community social, economic and environmental needs and desires of the communities in both Fieldway Ward and New Addington Ward.

#### Policy Context

Like many London Boroughs, Croydon is undergoing extensive regeneration in key areas to increase housing supply, tackle social, economic and environmental issues and to identify key sites for redevelopment including some greenfield and brownfield sites.

New Addington is an area in south London in the London Borough of Croydon. It is a large local authority estate surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt of open countryside, woodland and golf courses. White British is the largest ethnic group, encompassing 73% of the New Addington ward as of the 2011 census. The area's isolation from the rest of the Croydon borough has given it a strong sense of community and independence. The distance from Croydon and other centres, with for many years' patchy bus services the only main transport links prevented New Addington residents from being able to access a full range of employment and educational facilities or indeed shops. The area was declared one of the first Education Action Zones by the Labour government, with extra investment and

opportunities for partnership for schools. The London Borough of Croydon increased its investment in the remaining housing stock and in the leisure and youth facilities.

New Addington has however continued to suffer from various reports of violence and public upset for several years, reflecting upon anti-social behaviour and gang violence involving youths on the estate from the 1970s to the present, as well as the perceived poor standard of schools, low educational and health standards, and a reported high number of teenage mothers, particularly in Fieldway. In a *Croydon Advertiser* survey in 2013, New Addington, in comparison with other areas, was said to be the worst in Croydon to live, based on life expectancy, incapacity benefit claimants' rates and income support, unemployment, crime, school exam passes, public transport accessibility and access to open space and nature.

The area was affected during the 2011 England Riots. A supermarket was destroyed by firebombs and stolen property was found in the area. An inquiry supported the provision of a local police station.

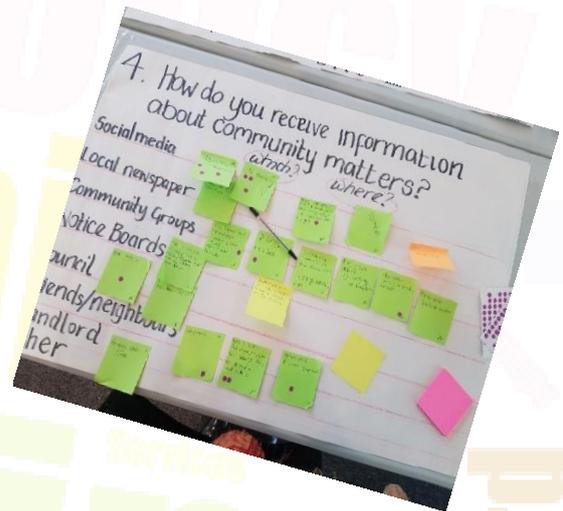
The estate was also the scene of the disappearance and death of teenager Tia Sharp. Residents of New Addington refuted comments from journalists who they felt inaccurately cited her death as an example in reflecting the area's issues. In 2013, the area was featured 3 times in the same episode of *Crimewatch UK*, predominantly focusing on the area's surfeit of gang culture.

#### Research and Consultation Methodology

Due to the nature and history of the community in New Addington, it was decided early on that the best way to approach this project would be to engage with stakeholders face-to-face to try to understand the psychology of the communities and to elicit which methods would be best to employ. Meetings were held with a number of local groups that provide a range of services to the local community.

**Community Consultation Findings**  
 Several exercises were designed for the residents on the area considering the demographics and character of the area. The findings were designed to elicit from participants their needs, wants and desires for the community and area. Due to expected low turnout, (the community is renowned for a lack of engagement) the consultation questions were also put into an online survey, via community Facebook pages, thereby enhancing the ways in which local people could have their voices heard.

Community Consultation events were held and where residents were reluctant or unable to write their comments on the post-it notes, the Consultant assisted, this also included residents who participated via telephone.



Initial findings from discussions with resident and community groups indicated that there was little appetite or 'community will' for the establishment of a new secondary school for the area. The *new* academy Meridian High (formerly New Addington High) had support from residents who wished to see it *given a chance* to serve the young people from the area.

Findings from the research were shared with a local community group along with advice and support to access funding based on the findings.

