



KIAMA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
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Kiama Family History Centre

Service Delivery Options

Prepared for
Kiama Municipal Council

By
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Acknowledgement of Country

Jan Richards Consulting acknowledges the Wodi Wodi people on Dharawal country as the traditional custodians of the land on which Kiama Municipality is located, and pays respect to Elders past and present who hold the memories, traditions, culture and knowledge of Country. I also acknowledge the Nuenonne people of Lutruwita/Tasmania, where I live and work, as the Traditional and continuing Custodians of this land. I recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and I extend my respects to Elders past and present.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kiama Family History Centre has operated for more than three decades as a valued community resource supporting family history research, local heritage and community connection. Established in 1989 within a very different technological and service environment, the Centre developed as a specialised genealogical research facility supported by volunteers, dedicated collections and fee-based access arrangements.

This review was commissioned by Kiama Municipal Council to examine the current Family History service model and consider future service delivery options in response to changing patterns of use, operational sustainability considerations and contemporary public library practice. The review was undertaken between April and May 2026 and included document and data analysis, benchmarking of comparable services and targeted consultation with volunteers, historical societies, community members, Councillors and Library staff.

The review found that the Family History Centre continues to provide important community value through:

- personalised support and local knowledge;
- contribution to local heritage and community identity;
- volunteer expertise and continuity;
- opportunities for social connection and shared learning.

At the same time, the review identified that the broader family history research environment has changed significantly over time. The rapid growth of online genealogy platforms, digitised records and self-directed research has transformed patterns of use and service expectations across the public library sector. Increasingly, users undertake substantial components of family history research independently and seek targeted assistance, digital support and local contextual knowledge rather than ongoing access to a continuously staffed research facility.

The review also identified a number of operational and sustainability challenges associated with the current service model, including:

- staffing and supervision requirements associated with a separately located service area;
- reliance on legacy operational arrangements developed in a different service environment;
- relatively modest and intermittent patterns of direct usage;
- limited integration with broader Local Studies and Library services;
- volunteer coordination and communication challenges;
- increasing governance, compliance and operational expectations within contemporary public library services.

Benchmarking demonstrated that family history services across New South Wales are increasingly delivered through integrated library models or structured partnerships with incorporated family history societies. No comparable library services operate standalone specialist family history centres of the type originally established in Kiama. Benchmarking also

highlighted that smaller library services generally operate more limited and integrated family history models reflecting staffing capacity, scale and contemporary patterns of demand.

Three broad future service delivery options were considered as part of the review:

OPTION 1 – MAINTAIN THE CURRENT MODEL Continue the existing volunteer-supported Family History Centre with current operational arrangements. While this option would maintain continuity and existing practices, the review found that it does not adequately address long-term sustainability, staffing and operational challenges.
OPTION 2 – INTEGRATED LIBRARY AND LOCAL STUDIES MODEL Retain family history services as part of Kiama Library while strengthening integration with Local Studies and broader Library services through a more sustainable, flexible and contemporary model. This option includes continued volunteer involvement, improved operational integration, clearer service priorities, increased digital support and stronger collaboration across the local heritage sector.
OPTION 3 – COMMUNITY OR EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP MODEL Transfer responsibility for family history services to an incorporated community organisation or external partner. Consultation and benchmarking identified little support or practical capacity for this approach within the Kiama context.

The review concludes that **Option 2** provides the strongest balance between community value, volunteer contribution, operational sustainability and contemporary public library practice.

The preferred future direction is therefore the development of a more integrated and locally focused family history service operating as part of Kiama Library's broader Local Studies and heritage framework. Key elements of this approach include:

- stronger integration between family history, local studies and broader Library services;
- continued volunteer involvement within a clearly supported framework;
- greater emphasis on Kiama-related heritage outcomes;
- flexible and digitally-enabled access arrangements;
- improved communication, promotion and collaboration;
- clearer referral pathways for specialist or non-local enquiries;
- more sustainable operational and technology arrangements.

Importantly, the review recognises the significant contribution made by volunteers over many years and the continuing value of family history services within the Kiama community. The recommended approach seeks to retain these strengths while positioning the service to respond more effectively to contemporary patterns of research, technology, staffing capacity

and public library service delivery. Given the continuing evolution of family history research, digital access and community expectations, the review also recommends that future service delivery arrangements be reviewed again within five years.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The review recommends that Council:

- adopt a more integrated family history and local studies service model within Kiama Library;
- retain volunteer involvement within a clearly supported and coordinated framework;
- strengthen integration between family history, local studies and broader Library services;
- prioritise locally relevant family history and heritage outcomes;
- develop a more sustainable service model that reflects how people now undertake family history research.
- improve collaboration and communication across the local heritage sector;
- review current space, technology and operational arrangements to improve long-term sustainability and service integration.

Details of all 12 Recommendations are contained in Section 13 beginning on page 39.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Kiama Family History Centre has operated for many years as a valued community resource supporting family history research and access to genealogical information. Established in a very different technological and service environment, the Centre developed at a time when access to specialist family history resources, indexes and research expertise was limited outside dedicated centres and volunteer organisations.

In recent years, however, the family history research environment has changed significantly. The growth of online genealogy platforms, digitised records and increasingly sophisticated search technologies has transformed the way people undertake family history research. Many users now commence research independently and access resources remotely, while continuing to seek targeted assistance in navigating complex information sources, assessing reliability and building digital literacy skills.

At the same time, public library services in New South Wales continue to evolve in response to changing community expectations, technology, service models and resource pressures. Public library services operate within the framework of the *Library Act 1939* and associated standards and guidelines issued by the Library Council of NSW and State Library of NSW. These frameworks require that access to library collections and basic reference assistance be provided free of charge, while also recognising the need for sustainable and contemporary service delivery models.

This review was commissioned by Kiama Municipal Council following concerns and community discussion regarding the future operation of the Family History Centre and broader questions relating to service sustainability, staffing, governance, volunteer involvement and alignment with contemporary public library practice.

The purpose of the review is to:

- examine the current Family History service model;
- consider patterns of use and community expectations;
- review operational, governance and sustainability considerations;
- benchmark comparable services;
- identify potential future service delivery options.

The review considers the relationship between the Family History Centre, Local Studies and broader Library services, together with the important contribution of volunteers, historical societies and community stakeholders in supporting local heritage and family history activities within the Kiama community.

The report draws on document and data review, benchmarking, stakeholder consultation and analysis undertaken between April and May 2026.

3. METHODOLOGY

This review was undertaken between April and May 2026 in accordance with the scope outlined by Kiama Municipal Council and the methodology proposed by Jan Richards Consulting. The review combined:

- document and data review;
- benchmarking and environmental scanning;
- targeted stakeholder consultation.

The purpose of the review was to develop an evidence-based understanding of the current Family History service model, patterns of use and demand, community expectations, operational considerations and future service delivery options.

DOCUMENT AND DATA REVIEW

Relevant background documentation, service statistics, enquiry records, operational information, strategic plans and State Library of NSW guidelines were reviewed as part of the project.

BENCHMARKING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The review considered broader trends in family history research and service delivery, particularly the increasing use of online genealogy platforms and digital resources. A high-level benchmarking review of comparable library and family history services was also undertaken.

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

A site visit was undertaken in Kiama on 28 and 29 April 2026, including observation of the Family History Centre and Library environment. Family History Centre volunteers, representatives of the Kiama and Gerringong Historical Societies, community members and elected representatives were invited to participate in focus groups or one-on-one discussions as part of the consultation process. Council's Community Engagement Officer also assisted in facilitating consultation and feedback.

Consultation explored current use of the service, changing research patterns, the role of volunteers, opportunities for collaboration and future service delivery options. Additional feedback was also considered through enquiry records, email correspondence and discussions with Library staff.

ANALYSIS

Information gathered through the review was analysed to identify key themes, service strengths and gaps, operational considerations, sustainability issues and opportunities for future service development. These findings informed the options and recommendations contained within this report.

4. CURRENT SERVICE OVERVIEW

4.1 HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY HISTORY SERVICE

The Kiama Family History Centre was established as part of the redevelopment of the former squash courts complex in Railway Parade, Kiama. Purchased by Kiama Municipal Council in 1987, the site was redeveloped to accommodate a new public library together with a dedicated genealogical and education facility. The complex opened in 1989 as the Australian Genealogical Education Centre and Library Complex, with the Family History Centre located on the ground floor and Kiama Library on the upper level.

From its inception, the Centre operated as a specialised, stand-alone service with a strong focus on genealogical research, education and community engagement. Established as an incorporated community organisation, it maintained its own governance structure, developed dedicated collections, and attracted researchers from local, regional and international contexts. At a time when access to genealogical information was largely physical and mediated, the Centre played a significant role in providing access to records, research support and structured programs.

When it was established, the Kiama Family History Centre was innovative and forward-looking, reflecting growing community interest in genealogy and providing access to specialised resources and expertise that were not widely available through public libraries or online services. More than three decades later, however, the broader family history research environment, public library sector and economic context have changed substantially, raising important questions regarding the ongoing sustainability and relevance of the original service model.

The service operated on a cost-recovery basis, supported by a strong volunteer base. Early information indicates that the Centre was open up to seven days per week and charged \$5 per half-day session or \$50 for an annual pass providing unlimited access. Adjusted for inflation from 1989, this equates to approximately \$14–\$15 per half-day visit or \$135–\$150 annually in today's terms. This reflects the Centre's original positioning as a specialised, subscription-style research service, supported by a combination of user fees, volunteer contribution and Council-provided facilities.

In 2008, the incorporated organisation managing the Centre was wound up and responsibility for the service transferred fully to Kiama Municipal Council. From this point, family history services were incorporated into Kiama Library Services. While the name "Kiama Family History Centre" continued to be used for a period, the service transitioned from a distinct, community-managed entity to an integrated library function.

This evolution reflects broader changes in the delivery of family history services, including the shift from specialised, location-based research to increasingly digital, self-directed access. While elements of the original model remain, particularly in the ongoing contribution of volunteers, the current service operates within a significantly changed research and service environment. The original cost-recovery model is also notably different from contemporary

expectations of free, drop-in access within public libraries, highlighting a shift in both service delivery and community expectations over time.

This historical context provides an important foundation for understanding how the service has evolved and the challenges it now faces within a contemporary public library environment.

4.2 CURRENT SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Family history services at Kiama Library are currently delivered as part of the Library's broader local studies and reference services. The Family History Centre is located on the ground floor of Kiama Library and incorporates specialist family history resources together with local studies materials and digital genealogy resources.

The service is supported by a group of experienced volunteers who provide assistance to users seeking help with family history research. Volunteers also contribute to a range of indexing and local history projects supporting broader heritage and research outcomes within the community.

Public access to the Centre is currently available for two hours each Thursday morning on a drop-in or by appointment basis, with volunteers available to assist users during these times. In addition, local and family history enquiries may be submitted for research assistance by Library staff or volunteers as time permits. Access to online genealogy resources, including *Ancestry*, is also available through Library public computers during normal Library opening hours.

Table 1: Current Service Snapshot

Measure	Current Situation
Service model	Volunteer-supported family history and local studies assistance
Location	Ground floor of Kiama Library
Public access	Thursday mornings, 10am–12pm
Access model	Drop-in or by appointment assistance
Research assistance	Staff and volunteer support as time permits
Database Access	Available during normal library opening hours
Volunteer role	Research assistance, indexing and local history projects. volunteer-supported project and indexing activities undertaken on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays
Free research allocation	Up to 2 hours per enquiry

4.3 OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The current operating model reflects both operational and compliance requirements. Under Council requirements, a Library staff member must be present onsite when volunteers are providing direct public assistance. As the Family History Centre is located on a separate floor from the main Library service area, this creates staffing implications and currently limits direct public access sessions to two hours per week.

While the same supervision requirements do not apply when volunteers are undertaking independent projects such as indexing activities, staff support and intervention is still required at times, particularly in relation to technology, access to resources and operational coordination.

In contrast to the original service model established in the late 1980s, the current service now operates free of charge and within standard public library service expectations. The role of volunteers nevertheless remains central to service delivery, with Library staff providing coordination, facilities, technology and resource access.

4.4 USAGE PATTERNS AND DEMAND

Available data indicates that the Family History Centre operates at relatively modest but ongoing levels of use, with activity reflecting both direct visitation and broader enquiry-based support.

Between 2020 and 2025, the Centre recorded approximately 4,173 researchers/visitors and 2,194 enquiries. While these figures were affected by COVID-19 related closures and restricted access arrangements during parts of this period, they nevertheless demonstrate continuing community engagement with the service.

Recent data indicates that visitation and enquiry patterns are generally intermittent and limited in scale, with many enquiries relatively targeted or specific in nature. Consultation and enquiry records suggest that many users now undertake substantial components of family history research independently using online genealogy platforms and digital resources, seeking assistance primarily for:

- interpreting online genealogy information;
- locating local records;
- troubleshooting research problems;
- confirming family connections;
- accessing local historical knowledge.

Analysis of enquiry records also identified that a significant proportion of requests relate to broader genealogical research with no clear connection to Kiama or the surrounding district. Examples included interstate and overseas family history investigations, shipping and immigration records and broader ancestry research unrelated to the local area.

At the same time, enquiries directly connected to Kiama, Jamberoo, Shellharbour and surrounding districts continue to demonstrate a strong alignment between family history research, local studies objectives and preservation of local heritage knowledge.

Table 2: Family History Centre Activity Data 2020–2025

Period	Researchers / Visitors	Enquiries
2020	603	270
2021–2023*	2,184	1,256
2024	846	668
2024–25 **	540	—
Total	4,173	2,194

*Includes periods affected by COVID-19 closures, restricted access and staged reopening arrangements.

** Visitor figures for 2024–25 reflect recorded attendance only.

4.5 EMERGING ISSUES

The current model reflects a hybrid of past and present approaches. It retains elements of the original specialised volunteer-supported service while operating within a contemporary public library environment characterised by open access, digital resources and changing patterns of use.

While the service continues to be valued by sections of the community, broader patterns of family history research and public library service delivery have changed significantly over time. This has created a degree of misalignment between the historical design of the service and current community expectations, staffing structures, operational requirements and patterns of demand.

5. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Consultation undertaken as part of this review included discussions with Family History Centre volunteers, community members, representatives of the Kiama and Gerringong Historical Societies, Library staff and Councillors. While perspectives differed across stakeholder groups, consultation identified broad agreement regarding the value of the service, the changing nature of family history research and the need to consider more sustainable and contemporary approaches to future service delivery.

Several recurring themes emerged through the consultation process.

5.1 STRONG COMMUNITY VALUE AND SENSE OF CONNECTION

Consultation consistently identified the Family History Centre as an important community resource supporting connection to family, heritage and place. The service was described as contributing to community identity and belonging, particularly through helping people explore personal and local histories. Participants also noted the Centre's longstanding reputation within the region and the value of retaining access to family history support within Kiama.

Consultation highlighted the continuing value of personalised assistance, particularly in helping users navigate complex resources, overcome research barriers and build confidence in using digital genealogy tools. The Centre was also recognised for contributing to a range of historical and indexing projects over many years.

5.2 CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

There was broad recognition that the family history research environment has changed significantly in recent years. Participants acknowledged the increasing use of online genealogy platforms and digital resources, with many users now commencing research independently.

At the same time, consultation identified ongoing demand for support in navigating online resources, assessing the reliability of information and developing digital literacy skills. Rather than eliminating the need for assistance, the digital environment appears to have shifted the nature of support required, with users increasingly seeking targeted guidance, troubleshooting and education. These changes also have implications for volunteers and library staff, who increasingly require confidence in using contemporary digital tools, online genealogy platforms and everyday technology applications to effectively support users.

Participants also raised emerging concerns associated with artificial intelligence and the reliability and accuracy of online information sources.

5.3 NEED FOR GREATER INTEGRATION AND CLARITY OF ROLE

A recurring theme across consultation was a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the Family History Centre, Local Studies and broader Library services. Participants noted that users are often unclear about the distinction between family history and local studies functions and identified opportunities for stronger integration between these areas.

Consultation also identified concerns regarding the visibility and promotion of the Family History Centre within the broader Library environment. Participants noted that many community members remain unaware of the service, its location, available resources and current opening arrangements. Concerns were also raised regarding signage, wayfinding and the degree to which family history and local studies resources are integrated and promoted as part of the overall Library service offering.

Historical societies indicated that they regularly refer family history enquiries to the Family History Centre while focusing primarily on local history research themselves. Both the Kiama and Gerringong Historical Societies expressed support for continued collaboration and partnership with the Library and Family History Centre, particularly in relation to programming, events and community engagement. However, there was no support for incorporating family history services directly into the remit or operational responsibilities of the historical societies.

Consultation also identified opportunities for stronger communication and collaboration between the Library, Family History Centre volunteers, historical societies and other heritage-related groups. Participants noted that some of this coordination had previously occurred through Council's Heritage Committee, which is no longer active. Rather than re-establishing a formal governance structure, there was interest in a more informal and collaborative approach, such as regular inter-agency meetings or networking forums, to support communication, information sharing and shared heritage outcomes.

Consultation additionally highlighted perceptions of separation between the Family History Centre and the broader Library service, including concerns relating to communication, leadership and organisational alignment. Several participants identified opportunities for a more unified, visible and collaborative service model, supported by improved promotion, clearer wayfinding and stronger integration with broader Library programming and communication channels.

5.4 COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A strong and consistent theme across all consultation groups was concern regarding communication surrounding the proposed changes to the Family History Centre and future service delivery model. Participants frequently expressed the view that the rationale for the review, the nature of the proposed changes and the broader context in which the review was occurring had not been clearly communicated.

This appears to have contributed to uncertainty, misunderstanding and, in some cases, a perception that the value of the service and volunteer contribution was not fully recognised. Consultation suggested that earlier engagement and more structured communication may have assisted stakeholders to better understand both the challenges facing the current model and the opportunities associated with future service development.

At the same time, the consultation process itself was broadly welcomed and provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share perspectives, clarify concerns and identify areas of common interest. A number of participants highlighted the importance of ongoing communication, collaboration and transparency in supporting future service planning and

maintaining positive relationships between the Library, volunteers, historical societies and the wider community.

5.5 IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers were consistently identified as central to the current service model, contributing significant expertise, local knowledge and personalised support. Participants highlighted the importance of maintaining volunteer involvement into the future and identified opportunities for improved coordination, communication, training and support.

Consultation also highlighted the important social role the Centre plays for volunteers themselves. For many participants, involvement with the Family History Centre provides a strong sense of connection, purpose and belonging, while also contributing to social interaction, shared learning and community cohesion. The collaborative nature of the service has fostered long-standing relationships and informal peer support networks among volunteers and regular users.

At the same time, consultation highlighted challenges associated with the current structure, including limited communication mechanisms, unclear leadership arrangements and reliance on individual knowledge and relationships. There was no appetite among volunteers to establish a separate incorporated body to manage the service independently.

5.6 SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Consultation identified a range of differing views regarding the future delivery of family history services; however, there was broad support for exploring new approaches that respond to changing patterns of use and contemporary community expectations. Suggestions included workshops, seminars, targeted one-on-one assistance, improved digital access, better promotion and stronger partnerships with community organisations and tourism operators.

While some participants expressed concern regarding reduced opening hours and access, there was also recognition that the current model may not fully reflect contemporary patterns of use. Several participants highlighted the importance of developing a future model that balances community value, accessibility, volunteer contribution, financial sustainability and effective use of Library resources.

Overall, consultation suggests that while the Family History Centre remains highly valued by sections of the community, there is also recognition that the service environment has changed significantly. The challenge moving forward will be to retain the strengths of the service – including community connection, local knowledge and personalised support – while adapting delivery models to better align with contemporary research practices, public library frameworks and sustainable service delivery.

5.7 KEY INSIGHTS

- The Family History Centre continues to be highly valued by sections of the community, particularly for the personalised assistance, local knowledge and sense of connection it provides.

- The role of the service has changed significantly over time, reflecting broader shifts toward digital, self-directed family history research and online access to genealogical resources.
- Users increasingly require targeted support, digital literacy assistance and help navigating online information, rather than ongoing mediated research services.
- The current service model reflects a legacy structure developed in a different technological and service environment and does not fully align with contemporary patterns of use or public library practice.
- Volunteers remain central to the service and contribute significant expertise, continuity and community connection. The service also provides important social and wellbeing benefits for volunteers through participation, shared purpose and social interaction.
- The current relationship between the Family History Centre, Local Studies and broader Library services lacks clarity, with opportunities identified for stronger integration, communication and collaboration.
- Historical societies value the role of the Family History Centre and support greater collaboration; however, there is no appetite for historical societies to assume responsibility for direct delivery of family history services.
- There is strong support for more coordinated communication and collaboration across local heritage, history and family history organisations, potentially through an informal inter-agency or networking approach.
- The current model presents challenges in relation to long-term sustainability, including staffing, volunteer coordination, operational costs, governance expectations and effective use of library space and resources.
- Future service models will need to balance community value and volunteer contribution with sustainability, legislative requirements, contemporary library practice and changing community expectations.

6. BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

6.1 BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

A review of comparable family history and local studies services across New South Wales demonstrates that a wide range of service delivery models are currently in use. These models generally fall into three broad categories:

- library-led services;
- partnership models involving incorporated family history societies,;
- and referral-based models where libraries provide basic support and refer specialist enquiries externally.

The benchmarking also highlighted the importance of scale when considering service delivery approaches. Under the State Library of NSW benchmarking framework, Kiama Municipal Council is classified within the "Urban Small" cohort. Comparable Urban Small library services include Bathurst, Lithgow, Armidale, Goulburn Mulwaree, Kempsey, Mid-Western Regional and Singleton. These services generally operate with relatively modest staffing levels and broad service delivery responsibilities across multiple library functions.

6.2 LIBRARY-LED MODELS

The services most comparable to Kiama were Hawkesbury Library Service and Orange City Library, where family history support operates as part of the broader library service rather than through a separate incorporated family history organisation. In both examples, libraries provide collections, databases, facilities, staff coordination and volunteer support. Volunteers contribute through research assistance, indexing projects, talks, seminars and community activities.

Both Hawkesbury and Orange demonstrate well-established and strongly integrated library-led models. Hawkesbury Family History Group has operated as part of Hawkesbury Library Service since 1989, while the Orange Family History Group transitioned from an incorporated organisation to a program of Orange City Library in 2008. However, both library services operate at a significantly larger scale than Kiama, with larger populations, staffing levels and broader operational capacity supporting these integrated service models.

Importantly, both services support more structured volunteer and community engagement than currently exists within Kiama, including regular meetings, newsletters, seminars and coordinated activities. In Hawkesbury, volunteers do not undertake formal research on behalf of others, with library staff providing basic assistance and more detailed research either referred or provided on a fee basis.

Shellharbour City Libraries and Museum also operates a library-led model where volunteers provide "how-to" support and guidance within a broader museum and local history framework.

6.3 PARTNERSHIP MODELS

The majority of benchmarked services operate through partnerships between public libraries and incorporated family history societies. Examples include Blue Mountains, Campbelltown, Cessnock, Port Macquarie and Wollongong. In these models:

- libraries generally provide facilities, collections, databases and public access;
- while incorporated societies provide volunteer coordination, specialist support, meetings, newsletters and community activities.

A common feature across these partnership models is the presence of:

- incorporated governance structures;
- membership-based organisations;
- regular meetings and newsletters;
- seminars and educational activities;
- broader volunteer and community engagement programs.

Many partnership models also distinguish clearly between the role of library staff and the role of volunteer societies. Libraries generally provide access to resources and basic assistance, while specialist or extended genealogical research is undertaken by volunteers, referred externally or provided on a fee-for-service basis.

Several partnership models also maintain separate society collections or member-only resources housed within library facilities, reflecting the independent organisational status of the partner societies.

Benchmarking also identified that, in the majority of comparable services, family history and local studies collections are either integrated within the main library service area or located within clear sight of library staff work areas. This arrangement assists with supervision, customer support, operational efficiency and volunteer coordination, while also minimising compliance and staffing issues associated with isolated or separately supervised spaces.

6.4 REFERRAL AND MINIMAL SERVICE MODELS

A smaller number of services operate primarily as referral-based or minimal access models. Lithgow Library, which also falls within the State Library's Urban Small cohort, provides collections and basic assistance while referring more complex enquiries to the Lithgow and District Family History Society.

Similarly, Shoalhaven Libraries provide access to collections and genealogy databases while referring detailed family history research externally to local family history societies.

Benchmarking of several Urban Small cohort libraries, including Armidale, Goulburn Mulwaree, Kempsey, Mid-Western Regional and Singleton, identified relatively limited family history service provision. These libraries typically provide access to genealogy databases, local collections or website links to external organisations, with little evidence of dedicated family history staffing, structured volunteer programs or specialist research services.

6.5 KEY BENCHMARKING THEMES

The benchmarking identified several recurring themes relevant to Kiama:

- family history services increasingly operate as integrated library services or partnership models rather than standalone specialist centres;
- most services distinguish between basic library assistance and detailed genealogical research support;
- structured volunteer coordination, communication and community-building activities are common features of sustainable service models;
- incorporated family history societies typically undertake broader community engagement activities including meetings, newsletters, talks and seminars;
- smaller library services generally operate more limited family history models reflecting staffing capacity, scale and competing service priorities;
- digital genealogy resources and self-directed online research have significantly changed patterns of use and service expectations across the sector.

Benchmarking also highlighted the significant role that subscription genealogy databases now play in contemporary family history service delivery. Public libraries are required to purchase institutional licences for these resources, with pricing and access conditions differing substantially from private individual subscriptions due to the public and shared nature of library access.

Licence arrangements also vary between providers, with some databases permitting remote access by library members while others restrict access to designated library computers or onsite use only. These licensing arrangements have operational and financial implications for public library services and influence the level and type of family history access libraries are able to provide.

The benchmarking also highlights that Kiama's current model is somewhat unusual in combining:

- a library-led structure;
- significant reliance on volunteers for direct assistance;
- a separate dedicated space;
- limited formal volunteer or community coordination mechanisms.

Unlike many comparable services, the Kiama model does not operate through an incorporated family history organisation, nor does it currently support regular meetings, newsletters or broader structured volunteer and community engagement activities. Consultation suggested that this contributes to a sense of isolation and limits opportunities for communication, collaboration and shared planning.

Overall, the benchmarking demonstrates that contemporary family history services are increasingly focused on:

- integrated access to digital resources;
- targeted assistance and education;
- structured volunteer coordination;

- stronger alignment with broader local studies, heritage and public library service frameworks.

A detailed benchmarking comparison table is included as Appendix 1.

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7. KEY ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Over the past decade, family history research has undergone significant change, driven largely by the rapid expansion of digital resources and online access to records. Major commercial platforms such as *Ancestry*, *Findmypast* and *MyHeritage* have transformed the way individuals undertake genealogical research, providing direct access to large-scale, searchable databases of records that were previously only available through specialist centres, archives or microform collections.

As a result, family history research has become increasingly self-directed and accessible, with many users able to undertake substantial research independently from home. Online tutorials, forums and social media groups have further supported this shift, enabling users to develop skills and share knowledge without the need for formal, location-based services.

This change has also influenced patterns of demand within public libraries. Rather than requiring extended, in-person research sessions, users are more likely to seek targeted assistance, particularly at the beginning of their research or when encountering specific challenges. Demand for ongoing, support has reduced in many locations, with a corresponding increase in interest in short workshops, one-on-one consultations, and access to digital resources.

At the same time, there has been a broader shift within the community sector. Many historical and genealogical societies continue to play an important role in preserving local knowledge and supporting research; however, a number of organisations have experienced declining membership and volunteer capacity, reflecting wider trends in volunteering and community participation. This has implications for the sustainability of traditional, volunteer-led service models.

Taken together, these changes indicate a transition from a specialised, centre-based model of service delivery to one that is more flexible, digitally enabled and responsive to varying levels of user need. Public libraries are increasingly required to balance access to digital resources with targeted support, rather than providing continuous, staff- or volunteer-mediated research services.

This shift challenges the ongoing viability of traditional, continuous, in-person service models and highlights the need for services to adapt to contemporary patterns of use.

7.2 SERVICE DEMAND AND USAGE

Patterns of demand for family history services have changed significantly over time, reflecting broader shifts in technology, user behaviour and access to online genealogical resources. While interest in family history research remains strong, users are increasingly seeking flexible, targeted and digitally-enabled support rather than ongoing access to a dedicated research facility.

Service statistics and enquiry records indicate that the Family History Centre continues to receive a steady flow of enquiries and visitors; however, demand is generally intermittent and increasingly characterised by targeted requests for assistance rather than extended onsite research activity. Usage patterns fluctuate considerably, with periods of low or no activity interspersed with busier periods, consistent with consultation feedback from volunteers and community members.

The nature of enquiries has also evolved significantly. Enquiries commonly relate to navigating online genealogy platforms, overcoming specific research “roadblocks”, interpreting records, assessing the reliability of online information and accessing local contextual knowledge. Several enquiries demonstrate the growing influence of digital genealogy platforms, DNA testing and online family history research, with users often seeking guidance and interpretation rather than access to records alone.

The enquiry records also indicate an increasing proportion of remote interactions, including email and telephone enquiries, alongside continuing but relatively modest levels of in-person visitation. A notable proportion of enquiries originate from outside the Kiama Local Government Area, including interstate and overseas researchers, with a number relating to broader genealogical research rather than matters directly connected to Kiama or the local region.

At the same time, consultation highlighted the continuing value users place on personalised support, local knowledge and assistance in navigating increasingly complex online environments. This was particularly evident for users with limited digital literacy skills or those seeking assistance interpreting conflicting or unreliable online information.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the primary value of the service increasingly lies in the provision of targeted guidance, interpretation, education and local contextual knowledge, rather than in maintaining a continuously staffed, standalone research facility. This shift highlights the growing importance of flexible and digitally-enabled service models capable of responding to varying levels and types of demand.

7.3 ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play a central role in the current Family History service model, contributing significant expertise, local knowledge, continuity and personalised support to users. Consultation consistently highlighted the value placed on the one-on-one assistance provided by volunteers, particularly in helping users navigate complex family history research, interpret records and build confidence in using online genealogy resources.

The contribution of volunteers extends beyond research assistance. For many participants, involvement with the Family History Centre provides an important sense of purpose, belonging and social connection. The Centre has fostered strong interpersonal relationships, shared learning and informal peer support networks over many years, contributing positively to community wellbeing and social cohesion.

At the same time, consultation and operational review identified a number of challenges associated with the current volunteer model. These include reliance on individual knowledge

and relationships, limited communication and coordination mechanisms, unclear leadership arrangements and differing expectations regarding the role of volunteers within a contemporary public library environment.

The evolving legislative and policy framework for public libraries also highlights the importance of clearly distinguishing between the role of volunteers and the responsibilities of paid library staff. Current guidelines emphasise that volunteers should complement, rather than replace, core library service delivery functions.

There was strong support for maintaining volunteer involvement into the future; however, consultation suggested that a more integrated and clearly defined model may be required. Opportunities identified included improved communication and coordination, clearer role definition, additional training and support, and greater collaboration between volunteers, library staff and local heritage organisations.

Consultation and operational review also highlighted practical challenges associated with volunteers undertaking project work independently outside designated public access sessions. While these activities make an important contribution to local heritage outcomes, they can generate intermittent staff support requirements relating to technology assistance, troubleshooting, access to resources and administrative support. Within a small library service environment, staff capacity to provide ad hoc support outside designated service times is limited.

The review identified opportunities to improve operational sustainability through more coordinated volunteer attendance arrangements, clearer project planning processes and increased support for volunteer skills development in areas such as digital literacy, use of online platforms and basic technology applications. Consideration should also be given to establishing baseline capability expectations and induction processes for future volunteers to support more sustainable and consistent service delivery arrangements.

Future service models should seek to retain the significant expertise and community value contributed by volunteers, while ensuring appropriate governance, sustainability and alignment with contemporary public library practice.

7.4 INTEGRATION AND ORGANISATIONAL ALIGNMENT

Consultation and operational review highlighted ongoing ambiguity regarding the relationship between family history services, local studies functions and the broader role of the Library service. While these areas overlap in practice, they represent distinct, though related, areas of activity.

Local studies services within public libraries are primarily concerned with the collection, preservation and interpretation of material relating directly to the history, identity and development of the local community. This includes local families, places, organisations, events and community memory, and contributes to broader cultural heritage and community identity objectives.

Family history research relating directly to Kiama families, local communities and regional settlement patterns contributes to the broader understanding and preservation of local

heritage. In these instances, there is a strong alignment between family history activity, local studies objectives and the Library's role in supporting community identity and historical knowledge.

However, enquiry records also demonstrate that a proportion of requests relate to broader genealogical research with no clear connection to Kiama or the surrounding region. In many cases, these enquiries could potentially be supported through general library access to online genealogy resources or through specialist family history organisations and societies elsewhere. This raises broader questions regarding the appropriate scope and prioritisation of Council-supported family history services within a contemporary public library environment.

Consultation and benchmarking also identified opportunities for stronger integration and collaboration between Local Studies, the Family History Centre, historical societies and other heritage-related groups. Participants identified benefits in more coordinated communication, shared programming and clearer alignment of activities supporting local heritage and community history outcomes.

The review identified opportunities for a more structured and collaborative approach to volunteer engagement and communication. Unlike many comparable family history organisations, the current Kiama model has limited mechanisms for regular group communication, collective planning or community-building activities. This contributes to a sense of isolation among volunteers and limits opportunities for shared learning, coordination and strategic development.

At the same time, consultation highlighted strong support for more regular communication and collaboration between the Library, Family History Centre volunteers, historical societies and other heritage-related organisations. Participants noted that this type of coordination had previously occurred, to some extent, through Council's Heritage Committee, which is no longer active. Rather than re-establishing a formal governance structure, there was interest in a more informal and collaborative approach, such as regular inter-agency meetings or networking forums, to support communication, information sharing and strategic alignment across the local heritage sector.

7.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The current service model reflects a legacy approach developed in a different technological and service environment. While the service continues to be valued, evidence indicates that demand, patterns of use and community expectations have changed significantly over time. This has created increasing tension between the structure of the current model and contemporary public library practice.

The current Family History model creates ongoing operational impacts associated with volunteer coordination, communication, supervision, enquiry management, space allocation and support for specialist resources and databases.

Historically, the service also facilitated the ordering of birth, death and marriage certificates on behalf of users. While costs were generally recovered, the process created additional staff administration and transaction costs for Council. Contemporary online access arrangements

now enable users to undertake these transactions directly through relevant government platforms, reducing the operational need for intermediary processing by Library staff or volunteers.

Consultation also identified that volunteers themselves often feel unsupported and isolated within the current structure, with limited opportunities for coordinated communication, shared planning or professional development.

At the same time, the Family History Centre remains highly valued within sections of the community, with volunteers contributing significant expertise, local knowledge and personalised support. This creates an ongoing tension between maintaining community expectations and ensuring sustainable, contemporary and operationally viable service delivery.

These factors highlight the need for a more integrated and sustainable service model that balances community value, volunteer contribution and operational realities within a contemporary public library environment.

7.6 STAFF CAPACITY AND OPERATIONAL IMPACT

Family history research is a specialised area requiring specific knowledge, experience and confidence in navigating genealogical resources, historical records and online research platforms. Consultation and benchmarking highlighted that many public library staff are generalist practitioners supporting a broad range of service areas and may not possess specialist family history expertise.

Uncertainty and varying confidence levels among public library staff in providing genealogical research assistance is also widely recognised across the library sector. The specialist nature of family history research, the breadth of genealogical resources available and the rapidly changing digital environment mean that many library staff do not feel fully equipped to provide detailed family history guidance beyond basic reference assistance.

At the same time, public library staff continue to play an important role in providing basic family history guidance, digital assistance and referral support. This highlights the value of ongoing professional development and skills maintenance in areas such as genealogy platforms, digital literacy support and contemporary family history resources. Previous State Library review feedback also identified the importance of broadening family history capability across Library staff to support service sustainability and reduce reliance on a small number of specialist personnel.

This issue is particularly relevant within smaller library services such as Kiama, where staffing levels are structured to meet broad operational requirements across multiple service areas, branches and community programs. Staff capacity is distributed across customer service, collections, programming, outreach, digital support and local studies activities, limiting the capacity to provide ongoing specialist genealogical assistance through library staff alone.

These operational realities have contributed to the development of a range of partnership and volunteer-supported family history models across the public library sector. Within Kiama, volunteers continue to provide significant expertise, local knowledge and personalised support

to users. Future service delivery models should therefore seek to balance the important contribution of volunteers with appropriate staff support, sustainable operational arrangements and contemporary public library practice.

7.7 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Public library services in New South Wales operate within the framework of the *Library Act 1939* and associated guidelines issued by the Library Council of NSW.

While the NSW public library standards and guidelines acknowledge local studies collections, reference services and volunteer policies, they provide limited specific guidance regarding the role and delivery of family history services within contemporary public libraries. As a result, family history support has evolved differently across NSW, with services adopting a range of library-led, partnership and volunteer-supported models reflecting local history, community expectations, staffing capacity and available expertise.

These guidelines distinguish between the role of paid library staff and the contribution of volunteers within public library services.

While volunteers can make a valuable contribution to community engagement, local history activities, indexing projects, programming and peer support, current guidelines indicate that volunteers should complement rather than replace core library service delivery functions, including reference and information services.

Contemporary public library services also operate within increasingly formal governance, privacy, communication and workplace safety frameworks. As a result, volunteer-supported services now require clearer role definition, induction, supervision and operational expectations than may have existed historically. Kiama Library has commenced implementation of more formal volunteer induction and acknowledgement processes aligned with Council policies and contemporary governance requirements.

Benchmarking and operational review suggest that fully volunteer-led service models operating with minimal staff oversight are increasingly difficult to sustain within contemporary public library governance, supervision and compliance frameworks. At the same time, consultation and benchmarking highlighted that family history research is a specialised area requiring specific knowledge, experience and confidence in navigating complex genealogical resources and online research platforms. Many public library staff are generalist practitioners supporting a broad range of service areas and may not possess specialist family history expertise.

This issue is particularly relevant within smaller library services such as Kiama, where staffing levels are structured to meet the broader operational requirements of the library service across multiple functions and locations. The capacity to provide ongoing, specialist genealogical assistance through library staff alone is therefore limited.

The current Kiama model reflects the significant expertise and longstanding contribution of volunteers, many of whom provide highly regarded assistance and local knowledge to users. However, the model also raises questions regarding role clarity, sustainability and alignment with contemporary public library practice and policy frameworks.

This distinction is reflected in a number of benchmarked library services, where library staff provide basic reference and local studies assistance while volunteers contribute through structured support activities, events, community programs and specialist society partnerships.

8. FUTURE SERVICE PRINCIPLES

Consultation, benchmarking and analysis undertaken as part of this review suggest that future family history services within Kiama Library should be guided by a set of clear principles reflecting contemporary public library practice, community expectations and long-term service sustainability.

While the Family History Centre remains highly valued by sections of the community, the broader family history research environment has changed significantly over time. Increasing digital access, changing research behaviours, operational considerations and evolving library service models require a future approach that balances community value with sustainable and integrated service delivery.

The following principles are proposed to guide future service planning and decision-making.

ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Family history services should support and strengthen understanding of Kiama's local heritage, families, communities and settlement history, recognising the important relationship between family history, local studies and community identity.

INTEGRATED LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY

Family history services should operate as part of an integrated public library and local studies service rather than as a standalone specialist function. This includes stronger integration of collections, staff support, programming, communication and customer service.

SUSTAINABLE AND CONTEMPORARY SERVICE MODELS

Service delivery should reflect contemporary patterns of use, staffing capacity, operational realities and financial sustainability. Future models should balance community access and volunteer contribution with effective use of library resources, space and staffing.

TARGETED SUPPORT AND DIGITAL ACCESS

The role of the Library should focus on providing access to collections, digital resources, local knowledge and targeted assistance rather than undertaking extensive genealogical research on behalf of users. Services should support self-directed learning, digital literacy and access to reliable information sources.

RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers should continue to play an important role in supporting family history and local heritage activities. Future models should provide clearer coordination, communication, role definition, induction and opportunities for collaboration, learning and community connection.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Future service models should encourage stronger collaboration between the Library, volunteers, historical societies and other heritage organisations through communication, shared programming and informal networking opportunities.

STRATEGIC AND LOCALLY RELEVANT PROJECT WORK

Volunteer-led indexing, digitisation and local history projects should align with Kiama Library's broader local studies objectives and focus on projects that provide clear community benefit, support preservation of local heritage and avoid unnecessary duplication of work undertaken elsewhere.

BROADER SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Opportunities should be encouraged for participation in broader family history and genealogy networks, training and professional development activities to support information sharing, awareness of emerging trends and stronger sector connections.

FLEXIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICE DELIVERY

Future services should support a range of access models, including onsite assistance, digital access, workshops, referral pathways and community programming, recognising that users increasingly engage with family history research in different ways and at different levels of experience.

Overall, these principles support a future model that retains the strengths of the current service – including local knowledge, volunteer contribution and community connection – while responding to changing patterns of use, contemporary public library practice and long-term sustainability considerations.

9. SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Any future model must ensure compliance with legislative requirements for free access and basic assistance, while recognising the potential for cost recovery in the provision of in-depth research services.

FEE-FOR-SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIP MODELS

The review considered potential fee-for-service and membership-based approaches as part of future family history service delivery. Historically, the original Family History Centre operated on a subscription and cost-recovery basis prior to integration into Kiama Library services.

However, contemporary public library services in New South Wales operate within a legislative framework requiring free public access to library collections and basic reference assistance under Section 10 of the Library Act 1939. State Library of NSW advice provided to Council also notes that volunteers should complement rather than replace core library service delivery functions and that in-depth fee-for-service research models would generally require staff undertaking research on behalf of users.

Benchmarking identified limited use of formal membership models within public library-operated family history services, with fee-based arrangements generally restricted to extended research services undertaken by external societies or specialist organisations.

Consultation also identified limited support for formal membership or subscription-based arrangements within the current Kiama context. In addition, the staffing capacity of a small public library service such as Kiama does not readily support the ongoing administration, coordination and delivery requirements associated with a formal fee-for-service research model.

Given the relatively modest scale of usage, staffing implications and administrative requirements, the introduction of formal fee-for-service or membership models is unlikely to substantially offset operational costs or provide a sustainable long-term solution within the current service environment.

9.1 OPTION 1 – MAINTAIN THE CURRENT MODEL

DESCRIPTION

Continue operating the Family History Centre in its current form (agreed March 2026), including:

- dedicated volunteer-supported service;
- separate service area;
- current staffing and operational arrangements;
- existing opening hours and support arrangements, including public access Thursdays 10.00am–12.00pm with Library staff and volunteers, together with volunteer-

supported project and indexing activities undertaken on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

ADVANTAGES

- maintains continuity for current users and volunteers;
- retains existing service identity;
- preserves established volunteer relationships and practices;
- avoids short-term disruption.

CHALLENGES

- current model reflects legacy service arrangements developed in a different technological environment;
- ongoing staffing and supervision implications;
- relatively low direct usage compared with operational costs;
- limited integration with broader library and local studies services;
- lack of structured volunteer coordination and communication;
- sustainability concerns associated with staffing, governance and operational efficiency;
- limited alignment with contemporary public library practice and benchmarking trends.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

While valued by sections of the community, the current model presents ongoing sustainability and operational challenges and does not fully align with contemporary patterns of family history research or public library service delivery.

9.2 OPTION 2 – INTEGRATED LIBRARY AND LOCAL STUDIES MODEL

DESCRIPTION

Retain family history services as part of Kiama Library while strengthening integration with Local Studies and broader Library services through a more sustainable, flexible and contemporary service model.

This model could include:

- stronger integration of local studies and family history collections and resources;
- volunteer-supported family history guidance;
- prioritisation of enquiries relating to Kiama residents, local families, communities and regional settlement history;
- clearer referral pathways for non-local or specialist genealogical enquiries;
- improved communication, coordination and volunteer support arrangements;
- public access sessions concentrated on Thursdays from 10.00am–12.00pm, supported by Library staff and volunteers;

- volunteer project activities, including indexing, transcription and local heritage projects, coordinated through designated volunteer work sessions aligned with staff support availability;
- consolidation of volunteer project work into structured sessions rather than multiple individual attendance arrangements throughout the week;
- increased digital access and self-directed research support;
- review of current physical arrangements, including opportunities for improved integration with the main Library service area;
- consideration of access arrangements and service hours based on demonstrated community need, staffing capacity and volunteer availability;
- more flexible and efficient use of library space and resources;
- review and rationalisation of dedicated family history technology and workstation arrangements, including opportunities to better utilise shared public access technology within the main Library service area for activities such as indexing and project work;
- stronger collaboration with historical societies and local heritage organisations.

ADVANTAGES

- aligns with contemporary public library practice and benchmarking trends;
- retains community access and volunteer involvement;
- supports stronger integration between family history, local studies and local heritage;
- retains focus on Kiama-related local heritage outcomes and community identity;
- supports more sustainable and appropriately targeted service delivery;
- improves operational sustainability and staffing efficiency;
- supports more flexible use of library space and resources;
- supports more sustainable management of specialist technology and digital resources;
- enables clearer governance, volunteer support and role definition;
- allows service delivery and access arrangements to better reflect actual patterns of community use and demand;
- supports improved volunteer training, induction and digital capability development;
- supports stronger communication, collaboration and community engagement opportunities
- provides more efficient use of staff support and supervision resources;
- creates greater opportunities for volunteer collaboration, mentoring and shared learning;
- supports more consistent project planning and coordination.

CHALLENGES

- requires change management and ongoing communication;
- may be perceived by some stakeholders as a reduction in service identity or autonomy;
- requires careful management of expectations regarding the scope and level of future service delivery;

- requires clear role definition between staff and volunteers;
- ongoing volunteer support and coordination remains important;
- may require adjustment to current volunteer attendance patterns and work practices;
- requires careful implementation and communication to ensure volunteers continue to feel valued and supported.
- changes to physical arrangements or service hours may generate community concern if not clearly communicated.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

This model provides the strongest balance between community value, volunteer contribution, sustainability and contemporary public library practice. It retains the strengths of the current service, including local knowledge, personalised assistance and support for local heritage, while responding to changing patterns of use, operational realities and broader sector trends.

The model also provides greater flexibility to align future service delivery, staffing arrangements and use of space with demonstrated community need and the operational capacity of a small public library service.

TABLE 3 INDICATIVE COMPARISON – CURRENT AND PREFERRED FAMILY HISTORY SERVICE MODELS

Area	Option 1 Current Model	Option 2 Indicative Model
Staffing model	Separate supervised service arrangements	Integrated support within broader Library operations
Public access	Fixed 2-hour weekly access session	Flexible access arrangements aligned to demand and capacity
Service focus	Broad genealogy support	Greater focus on Kiama-related heritage outcomes
Volunteer role	Informal structure	Clearer coordination and supported involvement
Dedicated workstations	6 dedicated PCs	Rationalised/shared technology arrangements
Technology support	Multiple standalone arrangements	Better integration with Library ICT environment
Space utilisation	Separate dedicated area	More flexible and integrated use of space

Enquiry management	Mixed local/non-local focus	Clearer prioritisation and referral pathways
Governance/compliance	Higher supervision requirements	Improved operational integration
Operational sustainability	Legacy model	Contemporary integrated model

9.3 OPTION 3 – COMMUNITY OR EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP MODEL

DESCRIPTION

Transition responsibility for family history services to an incorporated community organisation or external partner, with the Library providing varying levels of support, facilities or referral arrangements.

ADVANTAGES

- potential reduction in direct operational responsibilities for Council;
- greater independence for community-led activities;
- opportunity for specialised community governance structures.

CHALLENGES

- consultation identified little support for this approach among volunteers or historical societies;
- no existing incorporated family history organisation currently exists within Kiama;
- historical societies indicated they do not wish to assume responsibility for family history service delivery;
- significant governance, volunteer management and sustainability challenges;
- risk of reduced continuity and service capacity;
- potential loss of integration with Library and Local Studies services.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Consultation and benchmarking suggest this model is unlikely to be viable or sustainable within the Kiama context at this time.

10. FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The Family History collection has developed progressively over many years, with a significant proportion of material received through donations and community contribution. Additional acquisitions are generally incorporated within the Library's broader collection budget, with no separate dedicated collection cost centre currently maintained for Family History resources.

This arrangement reflects the increasing integration of family history resources within broader local studies and public library collection management practices.

Available data indicates that direct visitation levels are relatively modest when considered against the staffing, supervision and operational requirements associated with the current service model. However, consultation also highlighted that the value of the service extends beyond direct visitation figures alone and includes broader heritage, research, volunteer and community outcomes.

Table 3: Indicative Annual Operating Costs

Area	Cost	Notes
Staffing support and coordination	\$20,920	Based on current estimated staffing and coordination requirements of approximately 7 hours per week, including on-costs
Database subscriptions	\$2,435	Subject to review, usage analysis and rationalisation
Collections	Incorporated within Library budget	No separate Family History collection cost
Technology	\$3,000	Based on rationalised 3-PC arrangement within normal ICT lifecycle replacement program
Volunteer/project support	Existing	Integrated within broader Library operational support
Operational/admin costs	\$300	
Total	\$26,655	

Indicative operational implications associated with the preferred service model are outlined within Section 9.

While direct visitation levels are relatively modest, consultation highlighted that the service provides broader community, heritage and social value that is not fully reflected through quantitative usage data alone. This includes:

- support for local heritage and historical knowledge,
- preservation and indexing activities,
- volunteer contribution and social connection,
- community identity and belonging,
- access to specialised local knowledge and assistance.

At the same time, the review identified a range of operational and financial sustainability considerations associated with the current model. These include:

- staffing and supervision requirements,
- the operational implications of a separately located service area,
- volunteer coordination and support,
- specialist database subscriptions,
- administrative processes developed in an earlier service environment.

Subscription genealogy databases represent an ongoing operational cost within the service model. Usage data for these resources has been reviewed as part of this process to ensure ongoing subscriptions and access arrangements continue to reflect demonstrated community demand and appropriate use of Library resources.

Historically, the service also facilitated the ordering of birth, death and marriage certificates on behalf of users. While costs were generally recovered, the process created additional staff administration and transaction costs for Council. Contemporary online access arrangements now enable users to undertake these transactions directly through relevant government platforms, reducing the operational need for intermediary processing by Library staff or volunteers.

The review also identified opportunities to improve operational efficiency and long-term sustainability through:

- stronger integration with Local Studies and broader Library services,
- more flexible and efficient use of library space,
- clearer prioritisation of locally relevant projects and activities,
- improved digital access and self-directed support,
- more coordinated volunteer support and communication;
- opportunities to rationalise dedicated family history workstation arrangements and improve utilisation of shared public access technology within the broader Library environment.

Importantly, financial considerations should be balanced against the value of preserving and supporting access to Kiama's local heritage, community history and collective memory. Public library services frequently deliver significant educational, cultural and social outcomes that extend beyond direct quantitative usage measures alone.

Overall, the findings suggest that future family history service delivery should focus on achieving an appropriate balance between community value, volunteer contribution, operational sustainability and contemporary public library practice.

11. COMMUNITY-LED OPPORTUNITIES

Consultation undertaken as part of this review highlighted strong ongoing interest in local heritage, local history and family history activities within the Kiama community. While stakeholders expressed differing views regarding future service delivery models, there was broad support for strengthening collaboration, communication and community engagement across the local heritage sector. Importantly, consultation identified limited appetite for significant structural change within existing volunteer and community organisations.

Representatives of both the Kiama Historical Society and Gerringong Historical Society indicated that they do not wish to expand their current remit to incorporate direct delivery of family history services or specialist genealogical research support. While both organisations expressed support for continued collaboration and information sharing, their primary focus remains local history, heritage preservation and community history activities.

Similarly, consultation with Family History Centre volunteers identified little interest in establishing a separate incorporated family history organisation or formal governance structure. Volunteers expressed a preference for maintaining a flexible and informal model focused on research support, indexing projects and community contribution rather than organisational administration and compliance responsibilities.

At the same time, consultation consistently identified opportunities for stronger collaboration and communication between:

- Kiama Library;
- Family History Centre volunteers;
- Kiama Historical Society;
- Gerringong and District Historical Society;
- local Studies representatives;
- other relevant heritage and community organisations.

Participants noted that some of this coordination had previously occurred through Council's Heritage Committee, which is no longer active. Rather than re-establishing a formal governance structure, there was broad support for a more informal and flexible "inter-agency" style approach focused on communication, relationship building and shared heritage outcomes.

Potential opportunities identified through consultation included:

- regular networking or liaison meetings;
- coordinated heritage programming and events;
- shared promotion and communication;
- talks, workshops and seminars;
- collaborative indexing or digitisation projects;
- local history and family history education initiatives;
- improved referral pathways between organisations.

Consultation and benchmarking also highlighted opportunities to strengthen the social and community-building aspects of the volunteer program itself. Many comparable services support volunteers through regular meetings, newsletters, training opportunities and shared activities, contributing to stronger communication, volunteer retention and peer support.

Volunteer-led projects, including indexing, transcription and local history activities, should align with the broader local studies and heritage objectives of Kiama Library and demonstrate clear benefit to the Kiama community and local historical record.

To maximise the value of volunteer contribution and avoid unnecessary duplication, proposed projects should be developed collaboratively with Library staff and take into consideration:

- existing indexing and digitisation work already undertaken by the Family History Centre;
- projects completed by historical societies, libraries or other institutions;
- opportunities to improve public access to locally significant information;
- long-term relevance and sustainability of the resource being created;
- copyright, permissions, privacy and appropriate use requirements associated with historical records, images and digitised materials.

This approach recognises and values the significant contribution made by volunteers while supporting a more coordinated, strategic and mutually beneficial approach to local history and family history project work.

There are also opportunities for stronger engagement with the broader family history and genealogy sector beyond the Kiama region. Increased participation in state and regional networks, including the [NSW and ACT Association of Family History Societies](#), could provide opportunities for:

- information sharing;
- volunteer development;
- training and professional learning;
- awareness of emerging trends and resources;
- stronger connections with comparable organisations and services.

Broader engagement of this nature may also assist in reducing organisational isolation and supporting a more outward-looking and collaborative approach to family history and heritage activities within Kiama.

While there appears limited support for establishing new formal organisations or transferring responsibility for service delivery to community groups, there is significant opportunity to strengthen collaboration, coordination and community connection across Kiama's broader heritage and local history sector.

12. PREFERRED FUTURE DIRECTION

Based on the findings of this review, the preferred direction is the development of a more integrated, sustainable and locally focused family history service model operating as part of Kiama Library's broader Local Studies and heritage services.

This approach recognises that the current Family History Centre continues to provide important community value through local knowledge, volunteer contribution, personalised support and community connection. At the same time, the review identified significant changes in family history research practices, patterns of use, digital access and contemporary public library service delivery models.

The preferred direction seeks to retain the strengths of the current service while addressing identified challenges relating to sustainability, operational efficiency, staffing capacity, governance, technology support requirements and service integration.

Key features of the preferred direction include:

- stronger integration between Family History, Local Studies and broader Library services;
- continued involvement of volunteers within a clearly supported and coordinated framework;
- greater focus on Kiama-related local heritage and family history outcomes;
- continued support for residents of the Kiama Local Government Area undertaking family history research;
- clearer prioritisation of enquiries and activities that contribute to understanding of Kiama families, communities and regional settlement history;
- increased emphasis on digital access, targeted guidance and self-directed research support;
- clearer referral pathways for specialised or non-local genealogical research enquiries originating outside the Kiama Local Government Area;
- review of physical arrangements, technology platforms and dedicated equipment to improve operational sustainability and service integration;
- consideration of service hours and access arrangements based on demonstrated community need, staffing capacity and volunteer availability;
- more flexible and efficient use of library space and resources;
- improved collaboration and communication between the Library, volunteers, historical societies and other heritage organisations.

The preferred direction also recognises the importance of strengthening communication, volunteer support, staff capability, community engagement and broader sector connections as part of any future transition process.

The preferred direction also provides opportunities to better align volunteer activities with staff capacity through more coordinated attendance arrangements, structured project planning and improved volunteer support, training and communication. This approach

supports both operational sustainability and a more collaborative volunteer environment while reducing reliance on ad hoc staff assistance outside designated service times.

Rather than maintaining a standalone specialist research centre model developed in a different technological and service environment, the preferred direction reflects contemporary public library practice in which family history services are increasingly integrated within broader local studies, heritage and community learning frameworks.

Importantly, this approach does not diminish the value of family history within the Kiama community. Rather, it seeks to position family history services in a way that is sustainable, collaborative, locally relevant and responsive to changing community expectations, operational realities and patterns of use.

Draft *Family History Research Assistance Guidelines* have also been developed to support consistent service delivery, clarify the scope of assistance provided and support future operational implementation (Appendix 2).

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

ADOPT AN INTEGRATED FAMILY HISTORY AND LOCAL STUDIES MODEL

That Council endorse the development of a more integrated family history and local studies service model operating as part of Kiama Library's broader heritage and community learning services.

The future model should:

- strengthen integration between Family History, Local Studies and broader Library services;
- support flexible and digitally-enabled access;
- improve operational sustainability;
- retain opportunities for volunteer and community involvement.

RECOMMENDATION 2

CLARIFY SERVICE SCOPE AND PRIORITIES

As a Council-supported public library service, family history assistance should continue to be available to residents of the Kiama Local Government Area, including access to genealogy databases, local studies resources and volunteer-supported family history activities and guidance.

Priority should also continue to be given to enquiries that:

- relate directly to Kiama families, local communities and regional settlement history;
- contribute to preservation and understanding of local heritage and community identity;
- support individuals researching family connections to the Kiama district.

For enquiries originating outside the Kiama Local Government Area, priority should generally be given to research with a clear connection to Kiama or the surrounding region. Broader genealogical enquiries unrelated to the local area may be more appropriately supported through specialist family history organisations, online resources or other library services.

This approach recognises the strong alignment between local family history research, local studies objectives and the Library's broader role in preserving and supporting community identity, heritage and historical knowledge, while also supporting sustainable and appropriately targeted service delivery.

Adoption of clear operational guidelines and communication materials will assist implementation, staff and volunteer role clarity, and consistent enquiry management.

RECOMMENDATION 3

CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN INTEGRATION BETWEEN FAMILY HISTORY AND LOCAL STUDIES

Continue to Strengthen the integration of family history, local studies and local heritage activities through:

- coordinated collections and programming;
- improved communication and promotion;
- clearer wayfinding and signage;
- stronger alignment with broader Library and heritage services.

RECOMMENDATION 4

CONTINUE AND SUPPORT VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Continue volunteer involvement as an important component of future family history and local heritage activities within a clearly supported and coordinated framework.

This should include:

- clearer role definition;
- improved communication mechanisms;
- induction and support processes;
- opportunities for practical training, digital skills development and shared learning, including support in using contemporary genealogy platforms, digital tools and everyday technology applications;
- consolidate volunteer-supported project activities into designated and coordinated work sessions aligned with staff capacity, supported by volunteer training, digital skills development and clear induction arrangements for new volunteers;
- establish practical communication and coordination processes to support information sharing, continuity and collaboration between volunteers and Library staff;
- recognition of the important social and community contribution made by volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

SUPPORT STAFF CAPABILITY IN FAMILY HISTORY ASSISTANCE

Recognising the specialised nature of family history research, Kiama Library should continue to support the development and maintenance of staff capability in responding to basic family history enquiries, digital genealogy resources and appropriate referral pathways.

This may include ongoing professional development, participation in relevant training opportunities and access to current sector information and resources appropriate to the scale of the Library service.

RECOMMENDATION 6

DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE AND TARGETED SERVICE APPROACH

Future family history service delivery should reflect the scale of the Library service, available staffing and volunteer capacity, and contemporary patterns of use.

This may include:

- prioritising targeted assistance and locally relevant enquiries;
- supporting self-directed access to genealogy resources and digital tools;
- continuing volunteer-supported access sessions where feasible;
- providing basic guidance and referral assistance where appropriate;
- referring specialised or non-local research enquiries to relevant external organisations, online resources or specialist family history services.

This approach recognises that many users now undertake substantial family history research independently and that smaller public library services may not have the capacity to provide ongoing specialist genealogical assistance across all areas of enquiry.

RECOMMENDATION 7

IMPROVE COLLABORATION ACROSS THE HERITAGE SECTOR

Facilitate stronger communication and collaboration between:

- Kiama Library;
- Family History Centre volunteers;
- Kiama Historical Society and Gerringong and District Historical Society;
- local heritage organisations;
- other relevant community stakeholders.

This may include informal networking meetings, collaborative programming and shared heritage initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 8

SUPPORT STRATEGIC VOLUNTEER PROJECT WORK

Ensure volunteer-led indexing, digitisation and local history projects:

- align with Kiama Library's broader local studies objectives;
- demonstrate clear community benefit;
- support preservation of local heritage;
- avoid unnecessary duplication of work undertaken elsewhere.

Project priorities should be developed collaboratively between volunteers and Library staff.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Strengthen External Sector Engagement

Encourage participation in broader family history and genealogy networks, including the NSW and ACT Association of Family History Societies, to support:

- information sharing;
- volunteer development;
- awareness of emerging trends;
- stronger sector connections.

RECOMMENDATION 10

REVIEW SPACE UTILISATION AND OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Review current use of the Family History Centre space and associated operational arrangements to improve:

- integration with Library services;
- staffing efficiency;
- supervision arrangements;
- accessibility;
- flexibility of use.

This review should also explore opportunities to relocate appropriate volunteer activities, including indexing and project work, to areas within or adjacent to the main Library service area on the first floor where direct public supervision requirements may be reduced. This may assist in improving operational flexibility, staff efficiency, volunteer interaction and integration with broader Library services while continuing to support access to family history and local studies resources.

RECOMMENDATION 11

DEVELOP A TRANSITION AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

Recognising the strong community interest in the service, any future changes should be supported by:

- clear communication;
- ongoing stakeholder engagement;
- volunteer consultation;
- staged implementation planning.

RECOMMENDATION 12

REVIEW FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

Given the continuing evolution of family history research, increasing online access to genealogical resources and changing patterns of community use, Council should undertake a further review of family history service delivery within five years to assess:

- patterns of demand and usage;
- effectiveness of the revised service model;
- emerging technology and digital access trends;
- volunteer capacity and community needs;
- alignment with contemporary public library practice.

14. IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of any future service changes should recognise the strong community interest in the Family History Centre and the significant contribution made by volunteers over many years. Consultation undertaken as part of this review highlighted the importance of clear communication, transparency and ongoing engagement in supporting positive relationships between the Library, volunteers, historical societies and the broader community.

Any transition to a revised service model should therefore be undertaken progressively and in consultation with key stakeholders. Particular consideration should be given to:

- communication regarding the purpose and rationale for changes;
- maintaining positive volunteer relationships and continuity of knowledge;
- clarification of future volunteer roles and support arrangements;
- staged implementation of operational changes where appropriate;
- ongoing monitoring of service demand, usage patterns and community response.

Implementation should also recognise the operational realities of a small public library service, including staffing capacity, volunteer availability and broader service priorities. Opportunities for gradual change, pilot approaches and ongoing review may assist in supporting a sustainable transition while retaining the valued strengths of the current service.

15. CONCLUSION

The Kiama Family History Centre remains a valued community resource with a long history of supporting family history research, local heritage and community connection. Volunteers have played a significant role in the success and reputation of the service, contributing extensive knowledge, experience and commitment over many years.

At the same time, the review identified that the broader family history research environment has changed substantially since the service was established. Increasing digital access, changing patterns of use, evolving public library practice and operational sustainability considerations are reshaping the way family history services are delivered across the public library sector.

The findings of this review suggest that future service delivery should seek to retain the important strengths of the current model – including local knowledge, volunteer contribution and support for local heritage, while moving toward a more integrated, sustainable and contemporary approach aligned with the scale and operational capacity of the Kiama Library service.

Importantly, the review identified strong support for continued collaboration between the Library, volunteers, historical societies and the wider community. While there was limited appetite for significant structural change or the establishment of new formal organisations, there are clear opportunities to strengthen communication, coordination and community engagement across Kiama’s broader heritage and local history sector.

The review also acknowledges the vision and commitment of those who established the Kiama Family History Centre in 1989, particularly the significant contribution of Ray Thorburn and the many volunteers who have supported the service over subsequent decades. Their passion, expertise, loyalty and commitment have played an important role in preserving local historical knowledge and supporting generations of researchers within the Kiama community.

Overall, the review supports the development of a future family history service model that remains locally relevant, community-focused and sustainable, while responding appropriately to changing patterns of research, technology and contemporary public library service delivery.

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APPENDIX 1: BENCHMARKING REVIEW OF FAMILY HISTORY AND LIBRARY SERVICE MODELS

Library Led Service					
Library Service	Population	Staff	Service Model	Comments	
Kiama Library (Kiama Family History Centre)	23,173	9	Library-led service	- Provides facilities, collections, digital access and coordination - Volunteers provide direct assistance and support and undertake indexing/local studies projects - Limited structured group activity; - no regular meetings or newsletter	
Hawkesbury Library Service (Hawkesbury Family History Group)	68,704	17	Library-led service	- Established as part of Library in 1989 - Library provides facilities, collections, databases, staff support and coordination - Volunteers support programs, talks and community activities. They do not undertake research on behalf of others. - Regular meetings, newsletter, talks and seminars - Research undertaken by staff as appropriate; detailed research referred or fee-based	
Orange City Library (Orange Family History Group)	44,610	14	Library-led service	- Established as an incorporated body in 1983 the Group became a program of Orange City Library in 2008. - Library provides collections, databases, facilities, staff support and coordination - Volunteers assist with research support and indexing activities - Regular meetings, newsletter, talks and seminars	
Shellharbour City Libraries & Museum	81,566	23	Library-led service	- Provides facilities, staff support and databases through Shellharbour Museum program - Volunteers assist with "how to" family history support - Staff and volunteers provide guidance;	
KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE - SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS					48

Partnership Model				
Library Service	Population	Staff	Service Model	Comments
Blue Mountains Libraries	78,891	34	Partnership with Blue Mountains Family History Society Inc	- Family History Centre located on the lower ground floor of Springwood Library. Available when a Society volunteer is on duty Thursday 10.00am – 1.00pm. - Library provides access to major family history databases including <i>Ancestry</i> and <i>Findmypast</i>. - Volunteers provide advice and research assistance at Springwood (Thursday 10.00am – 1.00pm. weekly) and Katoomba (second and fourth Tuesday 10.00am – 12.00pm) - Meetings and regular programs
Campbelltown City Library	188,303	47	Partnership with Campbelltown District Family History Society Inc	- Campbelltown and District Family History Society's research room is located within the Campbelltown City Library - Available to community seven days a week during normal library open hours. - Library provides access to major family history databases including <i>Ancestry</i> and <i>Findmypast</i>. - Volunteers rostered to assist researchers Monday to Saturday 10am – 12pm. - Monthly meetings and member activities - Library staff do not undertake family history research.
Cessnock City Library	69,352	18	Partnership with Cessnock District Historical & Family History Society Inc	- Library provides a dedicated room at Cessnock Library rent free for the Group to meet and store their collection. - Library component of the collection available during normal library opening hours Monday to Saturday. Cessnock District Historical & Family History Society files only available when volunteers are rostered.

KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE - SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

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Port Macquarie Library	90,835	21.70	Partnership with Port Macquarie & Districts Family History Society Inc	- Volunteers provide advice and research assistance Monday and Tuesday 1am – 1pm - Library provides a dedicated room at Port Macquarie Library for the Group to meet and store their collection. - Library component of the collection available during normal library opening hours Monday to Saturday. Port Macquarie & Districts Family History Society files only available to society members on production of their membership card. - Society members provide research assistance and specialist support, Tuesday and Wednesday 10am to 3pm remote research fee-based - Meetings, talks and support groups
Wollongong City Libraries	221,894	67	Partnership with Illawarra Family History Group Inc	- The Library provides a room at Wollongong City Library where the collection is stored. Most items are available to anyone using the library during normal library opening hours. - Some items are only available to IFHS members, and these can be accessed by presenting a current IFHS membership card to library staff. - Research volunteers are available to assist Wednesday and Friday mornings 9.30am – 12.00pm. Specialist volunteers (DNA and Ryerson index) also available by appointment. - Library provides access to major family history databases including <i>Ancestry</i> and <i>Findmypast</i>. - Extended research fee-based - Meetings, newsletters and member activities

Referral Model				
Library Service	Population	Staff	Service Model	Comments
Lithgow Library https://library.lithgow.com/local-history-collection/	20,740	8	Library- service with referral to Lithgow and District Family History Society Inc	- Library provides collections and basic assistance, extended research fee-based - Complex enquiries referred to Family History Society - Limited formal community activities identified
Shoalhaven Libraries	110,803	25	Library service with referral partnerships to Shoalhaven Family History Society Inc and Milton Ulladulla Family History Society Inc	- Library provides collections, access to major family history databases including <i>Ancestry</i> and <i>Findmypast</i>. - Basic assistance by library, detailed research referred externally

Minimal Approach (Urban Small Cohort)				
Library Service	Population	Staff	Service Model	Comments
Armistade War Memorial Library	29,594	10.4		List of societies and museums on website
Goulburn Mulwaree Library	32,710	12		- Online databases - Links on website to local family history and heritage groups
Kempsey Shire Libraries	31,453	10		Dedicated PC for Family History use with access to Ancestry, and linked to microfilm reader (local newspapers)
Mid-Western Regional Council Library	25,921	9		- Library owned collection of 500 items - Ancestry - Links on website
Singleton Public Library	25,332	10		Ancestry

APPENDIX 2: KIAMA LIBRARY FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

1. PURPOSE

These guidelines have been developed to support the delivery of family history services within Kiama Library in a manner that is sustainable, locally relevant and aligned with contemporary public library practice.

The guidelines aim to:

- support access to family history and local heritage resources;
- provide clarity regarding the scope of assistance available through Kiama Library;
- support consistent service delivery by staff and volunteers;
- recognise the important contribution of volunteers;
- ensure services remain aligned with the Library's broader Local Studies and community heritage objectives.

These guidelines should be read alongside relevant Council policies, volunteer procedures and Library service frameworks.

2. SERVICE PRINCIPLES

Family history services provided through Kiama Library will be guided by the following principles:

- **Community Access:** Kiama Library supports equitable public access to family history and local studies resources consistent with the principles of the Library Act 1939.
- **Local Heritage Focus:** Priority will be given to activities and enquiries that contribute to understanding and preservation of Kiama's local heritage, families, communities and settlement history.
- **Sustainable Service Delivery:** Services will reflect the scale and operational capacity of a small public library service and will focus on targeted guidance and support rather than extensive research undertaken on behalf of users.
- **Support for Self-Directed Research:** The Library will support users to undertake their own research through access to resources, guidance, digital tools and referral pathways.
- **Respectful and Collaborative Practice:** Family history services will continue to recognise the important contribution of volunteers, local knowledge and community partnerships.

3. PRIORITY AREAS OF ASSISTANCE

Kiama Library provides family history assistance to both residents and visitors; however, priority assistance will generally be given to:

- residents of the Kiama Local Government Area undertaking family history research;

- enquiries relating directly to Kiama families, local communities and regional settlement history;
- research supporting local heritage and community knowledge;
- users seeking assistance accessing Library genealogy databases and local studies resources;
- projects contributing to preservation or interpretation of Kiama's local history and heritage.

4. ENQUIRIES THAT MAY BE REFERRED ELSEWHERE

While basic assistance and access to resources may still be provided where possible, some enquiries may be more appropriately referred to external organisations or self-directed online research resources.

This may include:

- extensive non-local genealogical research;
- interstate or overseas family history enquiries with no connection to Kiama or the surrounding region;
- highly specialised genealogical research requests;
- requests requiring significant ongoing staff or volunteer time;
- legal, probate or official certification research;
- requests more appropriately managed by archives, state libraries or specialist family history organisations.

Referral pathways may include:

- State Library of NSW;
- National Library of Australia;
- local and regional historical societies;
- NSW State Archives and National Archives of Australia;
- specialist genealogy organisations, online resources or commercial genealogists.

5. TYPES OF ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Assistance provided through Kiama Library may include:

- guidance in using genealogy databases and online resources;
- assistance accessing local studies materials;
- basic research guidance and troubleshooting;
- digital literacy support related to family history research;
- information about local history resources and collections;
- referral to appropriate external organisations or services;
- workshops, talks or learning opportunities where available;
- volunteer-supported guidance sessions subject to availability.

6. SERVICES NOT GENERALLY PROVIDED

Kiama Library family history services are not intended to operate as a full genealogical research service.

The service will not generally provide:

- extensive research undertaken on behalf of users;
- guaranteed research outcomes;
- legal or genealogical certification;
- preparation of family trees or formal reports;
- lengthy transcription or copying services;
- ongoing private consultancy-style support;
- unrestricted access to volunteers outside designated arrangements.

Support provided by staff and volunteers will be subject to availability, operational capacity and the broader priorities of the Library service.

7. VOLUNTEER AND STAFF ROLES

Family history services at Kiama Library operate through a collaborative model involving both Library staff and volunteers.

Library Staff

Library staff are responsible for:

- providing access to collections and digital resources;
- basic family history and local studies assistance;
- referral support;
- operational coordination;
- ensuring compliance with Council policies and Library procedures.

Volunteers

Volunteers contribute through:

- family history guidance and local knowledge;
- indexing and heritage-related projects;
- assistance with community engagement activities;
- support for users during designated volunteer-supported sessions.

Volunteer involvement complements the broader Library service and operates within Council volunteer policies and operational frameworks.

8. REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Family history research practices, digital technologies and community expectations continue to evolve.

These guidelines should therefore be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain:

- relevant;
- practical;
- aligned with community need;
- consistent with contemporary public library practice and Council priorities.

A broader review of family history service delivery arrangements should also be undertaken periodically as recommended in the Family History Service Review.

APPENDIX 3: OPTION 2 INTEGRATED LIBRARY AND LOCAL STUDIES MODEL AT A GLANCE

WHAT THIS COULD LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

The preferred future direction identified through the review is the development of a more integrated, sustainable and locally focused family history service operating as part of Kiama Library's broader Local Studies and heritage services.

Importantly, this approach is not about removing family history services. Rather, it seeks to retain the strengths of the current service while adapting delivery models to better reflect:

- contemporary family history research practices;
- changing patterns of community use;
- operational sustainability;
- the realities of a small public library service.

FAMILY HISTORY SUPPORT

Under this model, family history support would continue to be available through Kiama Library, including:

- volunteer-supported assistance sessions;
- access to genealogy databases and online resources;
- targeted guidance and research support;
- assistance navigating digital genealogy tools;
- referral to specialist organisations where appropriate.

The emphasis would increasingly be on:

- helping people undertake their own research;
- supporting digital literacy;
- providing locally relevant knowledge and assistance.

LOCAL STUDIES AND HERITAGE

The model would support:

- stronger integration between Family History and Local Studies;
- greater focus on Kiama families, communities and settlement history;
- preservation of local heritage and historical knowledge;
- collaborative indexing and heritage projects;
- stronger connections between the Library, volunteers and historical societies.

This recognises the strong relationship between local family history research, local studies and community identity.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers would continue to play an important role within the service through:

- family history guidance and local knowledge;
- indexing and heritage-related projects;
- community engagement activities;
- support during designated volunteer-supported sessions.

The model would also provide opportunities for:

- clearer communication and coordination;
- improved volunteer support;
- practical training and shared learning;
- digital skills development;
- stronger collaboration with Library staff and heritage organisations.

TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL ACCESS

The preferred model would continue to support access to:

- genealogy databases;
- online research tools;
- local studies resources;
- digital family history materials.

At the same time, opportunities would be explored to:

- rationalise and modernise workstation arrangements;
- better integrate family history technology within the broader Library environment;
- improve ICT support and operational efficiency;
- support increased self-directed digital access.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The model would support a stronger focus on:

- talks, workshops and learning opportunities within the Library's wider programming;;
- shared heritage and history activities;
- collaborative projects;
- improved promotion and visibility of family history services;
- stronger communication across Kiama's broader heritage sector.

There would also be opportunities to strengthen connections with broader genealogy and family history networks.

SPACE AND ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Future arrangements may include:

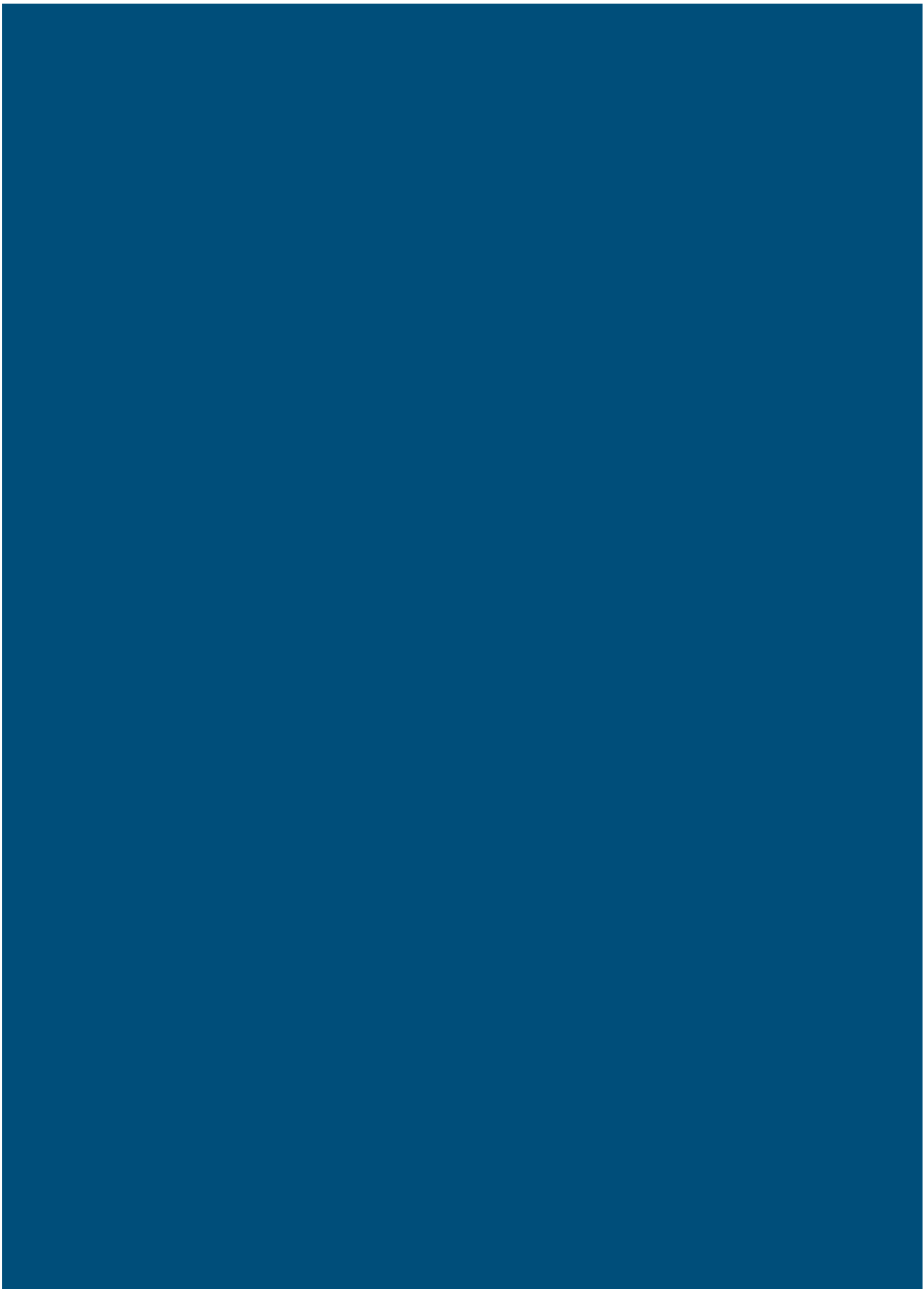
- more flexible use of Library space;
- review of current physical arrangements;
- improved visibility and wayfinding;
- access arrangements aligned with community need, staffing capacity and other Library programming;
- greater integration with the broader Library service environment.

WHAT WOULD NOT CHANGE

The preferred direction would continue to support:

- access to family history resources and databases;
- volunteer involvement;
- assistance with family history research;
- preservation of local historical knowledge;
- community connection through local heritage activities.

The review recognises the significant contribution made by volunteers and the important role family history services continue to play within the Kiama community.





KIAMA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
your council, your community

May 2026

Kiama Family History Centre

Service Delivery Options -Summary

Prepared for
Kiama Municipal Council

By
Jan Richards Consulting


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CONSULTING

Item 15.3

Enclosure 2

Item 15.3

Enclosure 2

1. PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

Kiama Municipal Council commissioned this review to examine the current Family History service model operating within Kiama Library and to consider future service delivery options.

The review was undertaken in response to community discussion regarding the future of the Family History Centre together with broader questions relating to:

- long-term sustainability;
- staffing and operational requirements;
- volunteer involvement;
- governance and compliance obligations;
- changing patterns of family history research;
- and alignment with contemporary public library practice.

The review was undertaken between April and May 2026 and included:

- document and data analysis;
- benchmarking of comparable services across New South Wales;
- consultation with volunteers, historical societies, community members, Councillors and Library staff;
- site visits and operational review.

The review considered both the ongoing community value of the service and the operational realities facing a contemporary small public library service.

2. KEY FINDINGS

THE FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE CONTINUES TO BE VALUED

Consultation consistently identified the Family History Centre as an important community resource supporting:

- local heritage and community identity;
- access to family history research;
- personalised support and local knowledge;
- volunteer participation and social connection;
- and preservation of local historical information.

Volunteers were recognised as making a significant contribution to the service through research assistance, indexing projects and support for local heritage activities.

KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE – SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS - SUMMARY

1

FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY

The review identified substantial changes in the way people now undertake family history research.

The rapid growth of online genealogy platforms, digitised records and DNA-based research tools means that many users now undertake substantial research independently from home. Rather than requiring continuous access to a dedicated research facility, users increasingly seek:

- targeted assistance;
- help navigating online resources;
- digital literacy support;
- local contextual knowledge;
- guidance in interpreting complex or conflicting information.

This reflects a broader transition from specialised, centre-based genealogy services toward more flexible and digitally enabled support models.

THE CURRENT MODEL REFLECTS A LEGACY SERVICE STRUCTURE

The current Family History Centre model developed in a very different technological and operational environment. At the time of its establishment in 1989, the Centre was innovative and forward-looking, providing specialised genealogy resources and expertise that were not widely available through public libraries or online services. While the service remains valued, the review identified several challenges associated with the existing model, including:

- staffing and supervision requirements associated with a separate downstairs location;
- relatively modest and intermittent patterns of direct usage;
- limited integration with broader Library and Local Studies services;
- operational complexity associated with technology and dedicated workstations;
- limited volunteer coordination and communication mechanisms;
- increasing governance and compliance expectations within public library services.

The review found that the current structure no longer aligns strongly with contemporary public library practice or current patterns of family history research.

BENCHMARKING DEMONSTRATED STRONG SECTOR CHANGE

Benchmarking of comparable library services across New South Wales identified that family history services are increasingly delivered through:

- integrated library and local studies models;
- partnerships with incorporated family history societies;
- targeted workshops and guidance;

KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE – SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS - SUMMARY

2

- digital access and self-directed support;
- structured volunteer coordination.

No comparable services operate standalone specialist family history centres of the type originally established in Kiama.

The benchmarking also highlighted the importance of scale. Larger services such as Hawkesbury and Orange support integrated family history models through substantially larger staffing and operational capacity than currently exists within Kiama Library.

COLLABORATION PREFERRED OVER STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Consultation identified strong support for improved communication and collaboration between:

- Kiama Library;
- Family History Centre volunteers;
- Kiama Historical Society;
- Gerringong and District Historical Society;
- other heritage-related organisations.

However, there was no support for:

- transferring responsibility for family history services to historical societies;
- establishing a new incorporated family history organisation;
- creating a fully community-managed service model.

Instead, stakeholders supported more informal and collaborative approaches such as networking meetings, shared programming and coordinated heritage activities.

3. CURRENT CHALLENGES

The review identified several operational and sustainability issues associated with the current Family History Centre model.

STAFFING AND SUPERVISION REQUIREMENTS

Under current Council requirements, Library staff must be onsite when volunteers are providing direct public assistance. Because the Family History Centre operates from a separate downstairs location, this creates staffing and supervision implications which currently limit direct public access to two hours per week. Volunteer-supported project activities outside designated public access times can also generate intermittent staff support requirements relating to technology assistance, access to resources and operational coordination.

SEPARATE AND ISOLATED SERVICE ENVIRONMENT

The current physical arrangement contributes to:

- operational inefficiencies;
- limited visibility within the Library;
- challenges with supervision and communication;
- a perception of separation between family history services and the broader Library service.

TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The service currently maintains multiple dedicated workstations and specialist genealogy resources developed over many years. While valuable, the arrangement reflects historical operational practices and creates additional ICT support and maintenance requirements.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE

The current model operates at relatively modest levels of direct use when compared with staffing and operational requirements.

The review identified the need for future service delivery to better align with:

- contemporary patterns of demand;
- available staffing and volunteer capacity;
- operational sustainability;
- the scale of a small public library service.

4. FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Three broad future delivery options were considered.

OPTION 1 – MAINTAIN THE CURRENT MODEL

Continue the existing Family History Centre model (adopted March 2026) with current operational arrangements: existing opening hours and support arrangements, including public access Thursdays 10.00am–12.00pm with Library staff and volunteers, together with volunteer-supported project and indexing activities undertaken on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

While this option would maintain continuity for existing users and volunteers, it does not address the sustainability, staffing and operational challenges identified through the review

OPTION 2 – INTEGRATED LIBRARY AND LOCAL STUDIES MODEL

Retain family history services as part of Kiama Library while strengthening integration with Local Studies and broader Library services.

Key elements include:

- continued volunteer involvement; through coordinated public access and project sessions;
- stronger integration with local studies and heritage services;
- clearer service priorities and referral pathways;
- flexible and digitally enabled access arrangements;
- improved communication and collaboration;
- more sustainable use of Library space and technology;
- greater focus on Kiama-related heritage outcomes.

This option provides the strongest balance between:

- community value;
- volunteer contribution;
- operational sustainability;
- contemporary public library practice.

OPTION 3 – COMMUNITY OR EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Transfer responsibility for family history services to a separate incorporated organisation or external community partner.

Consultation and benchmarking identified little support or practical capacity for this approach within the Kiama context.

KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE – SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS - SUMMARY

5

FEE-FOR-SERVICE AND MEMBERSHIP MODELS

The review also considered fee-for-service and membership-based approaches. While the original Family History Centre historically operated on a subscription and cost-recovery basis, contemporary public library legislation requires free public access to collections and basic reference assistance.

Benchmarking and consultation identified limited use of formal membership models within comparable public library services, and limited support for this approach within the Kiama context. The review found that the staffing, administrative and operational requirements associated with a formal fee-for-service model are unlikely to provide a practical or sustainable solution for a small public library service.

5. PREFERRED FUTURE DIRECTION

The preferred direction arising from the review is the development of a more integrated, sustainable and locally focused family history service operating as part of Kiama Library's broader Local Studies and heritage framework (Option 2)

Importantly, this approach does not diminish the value of family history services within the Kiama community.

Rather, it seeks to:

- retain the strengths of the current service;
- support ongoing volunteer contribution;
- strengthen local heritage outcomes;
- improve operational sustainability;
- align service delivery with contemporary patterns of research and public library practice.

The preferred direction includes:

- stronger integration between Family History, Local Studies and broader Library services;
- continued volunteer involvement within a clearly supported and coordinated framework, including communication, structured attendance arrangements, training, induction and digital skills support;
- greater focus on Kiama-related heritage and community history outcomes;
- targeted assistance and self-directed digital access;
- clearer referral pathways for specialist or non-local enquiries;
- review of current space, technology and operational arrangements;
- improved communication, visibility and promotion;

KIAMA FAMILY HISTORY CENTRE – SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS - SUMMARY

6

- stronger collaboration across the local heritage sector.

The review also identified opportunities to:

- improve wayfinding and visibility of the service;
- strengthen volunteer support and communication and practical digital capability development;
- rationalise dedicated workstation arrangements;
- support staff capability in basic family history assistance;
- strengthen engagement with broader genealogy and heritage networks.

An indicative outline of how the preferred integrated model could operate in practice has also been developed to support future implementation planning and community discussion. This is included in Appendix 3 of the *Kiama Family History Centre – Service Delivery Options Report* beginning on page 55.

6. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The review recommends that Council:

- adopt a more integrated family history and local studies service model within Kiama Library;
- retain volunteer involvement within a clearly supported and coordinated framework;
- strengthen integration between family history, local studies and broader Library services;
- prioritise locally relevant family history and heritage outcomes;
- develop a more sustainable service model that reflects changing patterns of family history research and increasing use of online resources;
- improve collaboration and communication across the local heritage sector;
- review current space, technology and operational arrangements to improve long-term sustainability and service integration;
- support ongoing communication and stakeholder engagement throughout any future transition process.

Details of all 12 Recommendations are contained in Section 13 of the *Kiama Family History Centre – Service Delivery Options Report* beginning on page 39.

CONCLUSION

The review found that the Kiama Family History Centre continues to provide important community, heritage and social value. At the same time, the broader environment in which family history services operate has changed substantially.

The recommended approach seeks to retain the important strengths of the current service — including local knowledge, volunteer contribution and support for local heritage — while moving toward a more integrated, sustainable and contemporary service model aligned with the operational realities of a modern public library service.

The review also acknowledges the vision and commitment of those who established the Kiama Family History Centre, particularly the contribution of Ray Thorburn and the many volunteers who have supported the service over several decades. Their passion, expertise and dedication have played an important role in preserving local historical knowledge and supporting generations of researchers within the Kiama community.

Recognising the continuing evolution of family history research, online access and public library service delivery, the review also recommends that future service arrangements be reviewed again within five years to ensure they continue to reflect community need and contemporary practice. The review also highlights significant opportunities to strengthen collaboration, communication and community engagement across Kiama's broader heritage and local history sector while continuing to preserve and support access to local historical knowledge and community memory.

Item 15.3

Enclosure 2