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# Norfolk County Council’s Consultation on proposed changes to opening hours and introducing a booking system at the Norfolk Record Office.

## Overview

The Council faces difficult decisions to deliver on its ambitions for the people of Norfolk against a difficult economic climate and more than a decade of reduced funding. Each year, the Council reviews its budget and proposes the savings it will need to make for the following year to balance its budget.

We carried out our annual budget and council tax consultation for 2024/25 between October and December 2023. However, the Government’s autumn statement and provisional funding settlement, which followed our budget consultation, set out a worse funding position for local authorities than had previously been anticipated. As a result, the Council is £4m worse off than it had expected to be.

For 2024/25 the Council has proposed £41.5m of new savings which may require further consultation. This is one of those consultations. The Council is doing its best to protect key services, but faced with rising costs, rising demand and under-funding, it must make difficult decisions to balance the books.

In this consultation we are asking for your views on our proposal to change the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office.

## Why we are consulting

We want to find out what people think about our proposal to change the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) and to introduce a booking system for appointments.

Under our proposals the NRO's new opening hours would be:

* Full Searchroom Service - Tuesday to Wednesday, from 9.30am to 5pm.  
  A total of 15 hours
* Limited Searchroom Service – Thursday and Friday, from 10am to 4pm.   
  A total of 12 hours.

We are consulting through:

- The online consultation, which is also available as a paper copy

- Email /Letter to key stakeholders and partners

- Email to members of the Norfolk Residents’ Panel

We are consulting from **15 February to 22 March 2024.** Please note that if we receive any consultation responses after this date, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to take them into account.

We will feed back the findings from our consultation to our county councillors as part of the evidence they will use to help them come to a decision about our savings proposals.

**If you need a copy of this consultation document in a different format please email** [**haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk**](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk)**, call 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.**

The consultation should take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

The questions start on page 12 of this document.

## Personal information, confidentiality and data protection

We will use any personal information to understand how different groups of people feel about our savings proposals.

We will process any personal information we receive from you in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), the Data Protection Act 2018 and Norfolk County Council’s data protection policy and guidelines. This means that Norfolk County Council will hold your personal data and only use it for the purpose for which it was collected, being this consultation. [You can find a copy of our privacy statement on the Norfolk County Council website.[[1]](#footnote-2)](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/privacy)

We won't identify individuals when reporting back our findings and under our record management policy we will keep this information for five years. We will also, under normal circumstances, not pass your personal data on to anyone else. However, we may be asked under access to information laws to publish or disclose some, or all, of the information you provide in response to this consultation. We will only do this where such disclosure will comply with such relevant information laws which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

You can choose not to take part in the consultation, to stop responding at any time, or to ignore any personal questions that you do not want to answer.

## Introduction

Norfolk County Council is committed to making Norfolk a county where businesses, organisations and communities continue to thrive together. [Our Better Together, For Norfolk strategy](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/corporate/council-vision-and-strategy)[[2]](#footnote-3) sets out our ambitions to be one of the highest performing counties in the country, overseeing economic growth, creating jobs and opportunities for the people of Norfolk, while maintaining and cherishing our environment, countryside and heritage.

However, we, like other upper tier local authorities, continue to face very significant pressures arising from rising costs driven by inflation, growth in demand and the National Living Wage.

Although the Council’s budget increases each year with Council Tax, it is not enough to meet growing needs and costs.

The October 2023 Cabinet meeting considered 2024-25 savings proposals totalling £26.5 million. [The 2023 Cabinet meeting minutes are available on the Norfolk County Council website.](https://norfolkcc.cmis.uk.com/norfolkcc/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/128/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/496/Meeting/2053/Committee/169/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx)[[3]](#footnote-4) They make a significant contribution towards our target of £41.5 million and will help the council to continue to deliver the key services for Norfolk’s residents, while balancing the books.

It is in these difficult times that the County Council cannot afford any complacency and, working with its partners, we consider how best to deploy our own limited resources to support the most vulnerable people and communities, whilst continuing to provide wider public services.

## Our current services

The Norfolk Record Office (NRO) collects and preserves unique archives relating to the history of Norfolk and makes them accessible to people in the county and across the world. Our team conserve documents, run education and wellbeing programmes, provide research advice and act as a first point of contact for people who are new to using the archives. As well as providing access to records used in historical research, the NRO acts a place of record for information relating to government, administration and citizenship.

One of the services that the NRO offers is a public searchroom where people can access the collection. This is open to anyone and is free of charge (many of the documents held by the NRO are covered by legislation and the public have a right of access to them).

As well as providing access, the NRO plays an essential role in collecting archives – it receives around 21 cubic metres of documents a year, all of which need to be assessed, processed, packaged and catalogued – and preserved for future generations.

Currently, the NRO opens Tuesday to Thursday, 9.30 am to 5pm with a full searchroom service (documents available throughout the day and all searchroom resources accessible) and on Friday from 10 am to 4pm with access restricted to documents ordered by noon on a Wednesday - totalling 28.5 hours per week.

To support its service, the NRO also provides paid services. All of these services relate to the NRO’s mission to collect, preserve and make archives accessible and include digitization on demand, official copies of birth, death and marriage certificates and archival boxes. In 2023 this accounted for around 34% of the service budget.

## Previous consultations

In 2023, we asked for your views about reducing the number of hours that the searchroom would be open with a proposal to close the searchroom on Fridays, but open half an hour earlier Tuesday - Thursday. Many of the responses received pointed out that researchers travelling to the NRO from outside Norfolk – sometimes from other continents – would be heavily impacted by this change. In response to this feedback, the plans were changed and the limited Friday service was introduced.

## Our proposal

Norfolk County Council is proposing to change the opening hours of the NRO. Currently, the NRO opens for a full searchroom service from Tuesday to Thursday, from 9.30am to 5pm – a total of 22.5 hours each week, and on Fridays for a pre-booked limited service from 10am to 4pm – a total of 6 hours. This means that documents have been available in the searchroom for a total of 28.5 hours.

Our proposal extends the limited Friday service to a Thursday with the same 10am to 4pm opening and maintains a full service on Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.30am until 5pm.

However, compressing the full searchroom service to two days runs the risk of excessive levels of demand in the searchroom, Therefore, the NRO is proposing to introduce a booking system on those days. People who turn up without booking will still be admitted, providing the searchroom has sufficient capacity, but cannot be guaranteed a place. People will be able to book an appointment via email, over the phone or in person at the NRO.

This means the NRO's new opening hours would be:

* Full Searchroom Service - Tuesday to Wednesday, from 9.30am to 5pm.   
  A total of 15 hours (booking recommended).
* Limited Searchroom Service – Thursday and Friday, from 10am to 4pm.   
  A total of 12 hours (booking and advance document ordering essential).

*Please note that the opening hours at the King’s Lynn Borough Archive would be unchanged. This consultation only applies to the Norfolk Record Office.*

**This means that documents would be available in the searchroom for a total of 27 hours.**

The NRO is also planning to increase the level of income generated by archive related activities to around 40% of the total budget. Included in the new plans are a new course aimed at improving the mental wellbeing of company employees based on the award-winning Change Minds project.

This proposal would save us £57,000 in 2024/25.

*FACTBANK:* **What we have considered when developing our proposal**

We have analysed data on searchroom use since changes were introduced in April 2023.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Day** | **Percentage of all visitors, on these days, to the searchroom** |
| **Tuesday (Full Service)** | 41% |
| **Wednesday (Full Service)** | 29% |
| **Thursday (Full Service)** | 24% |
| **Friday (Limited Service)** | 6% |

## Our questions about the proposed changes to the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office.

1. **How often do you use the Norfolk Record Office?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Every day it is open

Weekly

Monthly

A few times a year

Hardly ever

Never

1. **How far would you agree or disagree with our proposal to change the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office,** **meaning that documents would be available in the searchroom for a total of 27 hours a week as opposed to the current 28.5 hours?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree or disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don’t know

1. **How far would you agree or disagree with our proposal to introduce a booking system at the Norfolk Record Office?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree or disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don’t know

1. Please tell us more about why you chose those answers and whether you have any other comments on the proposals, using the box below [150 word limit]:

Please write your comments here:

## How we will make our decision and report back to you

We will take a report about the findings of this consultation to Cabinet for decision in June 2024.

Our county councillors will consider the consultation responses we receive very carefully. In particular, they will take into account:

* The impact of any proposal on individuals, groups or communities and in particular on people identified as having 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.  As well as this equality impact assessment, councillors will consider the impact of proposals on rural areas
* The views of people and stakeholders consulted
* The evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well
* The financial and legal positions and any constraints at the time
* Any potential alternative options, models or ideas for making the savings.

# About you

To make sure we are learning from a wide range of people – we would like to ask some questions about you. These are optional questions (so you may choose not to give this information), but this information is helpful to understand who is responding to our consultations.

1. **Are you responding as...?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

An individual / member of the public

On behalf of a voluntary or community group

On behalf of a statutory organisation

On behalf of a business

A Norfolk County Councillor

A district or borough councillor

A town or parish councillor

A Norfolk County Council employee

If you are responding on behalf of another organisation, what is the name of the organisation, group, or business?

Please write your answer here:

1. **How did you hear about this consultation?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Local media (e.g., newspaper, radio)

From a social media post (e.g., Facebook)

From a friend

From a group I belong to

From my place of work or education

The Norfolk Residents' Panel

District council web page

Norfolk County Council web page

My parish council

From an email I received

By post

1. **Are you...?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe (please specify below)

If you prefer to self-describe, please specify here:

1. **How old are you?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below*:*

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75-84

85+

Prefer not to say

1. **Do you have any long-term illness, disability or health problem that limits your daily activities or the work you can do?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

1. **If yes which of the following best describes your condition or disability?**

Please select **all** answers that apply:

Blind or partially sighted

Deaf or hard of hearing

Limiting health condition *e.g. heart disease, asthma, stroke, osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia and magic encephalomyelitis (ME)*

Learning Disabilities

Neurodiversity *e.g. autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia, dyspraxia*

Mental health conditions e.*g. depression, schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorders, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder*

Physical disability *e.g. limb disorder, amputee, wheelchair user, cerebral palsy, motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy*

If you have another type of disability not listed above, please write here:

Prefer not to say

1. **How would you describe your ethnic background?**  Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

**Asian or Asian British**

Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Any other Asian background, please describe here:

**Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African**

Black British

Caribbean

African

Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background, please describe here:

**Mixed or multiple ethnic groups**

White and Black Caribbean

White and Black African

White and Asian

Any other mixed or multiple group, please describe here:

**White**

English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British Irish

Gypsy or Irish Traveller

Roma

Other White background, please describe here:

**Another ethnic group**

Arab

Any other ethnic group please describe here:

Prefer not to say

1. **Which district/borough/city do you live in?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Breckland

Broadland

Great Yarmouth

Kings Lynn and West Norfolk

North Norfolk

Norwich

South Norfolk

1. **Do you have caring responsibilities?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below*:*

No

Yes – for children with additional needs

Yes – for older family members/ Adults

Yes - Parent Carer

Yes – for a disabled adult(s)

Yes, other. Please write here:

1. **Which of the following best describes you?** Please choose **one** answer only from the list below:

Employed (full time)

Employed (part time)

Self-employed

Unemployed

Student

Looking after the family home

Long term sick

Retired

1. **What is your first language?**

English

Other, please write here:

**Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this and respond.**

**You can fill in our online feedback form at:** [www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.norfolk.gov.uk%2Fsavingsproposals&data=05%7C02%7Cnathan.willcock%40norfolk.gov.uk%7C727fc0024e0c43c57d1f08dc2c9fea3d%7C1419177e57e04f0faff0fd61b549d10e%7C0%7C0%7C638434312531352374%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=MSx4OXHKPIC6cNm70nTD7CQKYDcXyAvMPX1ZZEwEaaU%3D&reserved=0)

**You can email return your feedback form to:** [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk)

**You can send back a paper feedback form to:**

Norfolk Record Office Consultation 2024/25

Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH.

However, if you want to help the council save money please use a stamp and send to this address: Stakeholder and Consultation Team, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DH.

You may wish to keep a copy of your response to our consultation for your own records.

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1. https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/privacy [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/corporate/council-vision-and-strategy [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://norfolkcc.cmis.uk.com/norfolkcc/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/128/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/496/Meeting/2053/Committee/169/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-4)