

Council pays consultants to undertake review

SWIM LESSONS ADVICE TO COST

by **ROB PREECE**

Council Reporter

CONSULTANTS have been called in to oversee a revamp of the lesson programme at city council swimming pools.

With Seaton Pool set to close in April, the council is carrying out a review of the lessons it offers at pools across the city.

Consultancy firm Think OTB has been awarded the contract to undertake the review, which is due to be completed within the next two months.

Councillor Peter Smith, Cabinet member for Creative Plymouth, said: "We've been looking at the programme of swimming lessons in the city for a fair while now. We want to make sure we've got it right.

"We've got a waiting list for lessons at the moment, and we want to make sure we're using the staff and the time we've got to the best advantage."

The review comes just two months before Seaton Pool, on the Plymouth International Business Park at Derriford, is set to close.

Labour Cabinet members agreed to close the pool last November after hearing it was costing the council £160,000 a year.

Members also heard that the authority would need to spend more than £1million to bring the crumbling facility up to scratch.

Conservative councillors tried to 'call in' the decision so it could be scrutinised further, but the challenge was defeated at a meeting last December.

The decision has put extra pressure on the council as it strives to accommodate lessons for city schools and swimming clubs.

But the authority has pledged to

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ensure that all groups which use Seaton will be able to swim at venues elsewhere in the city.

Cllr Smith said: "The revised timetable for Seaton Pool is out now for consultation. We believe that we can accommodate all the swimming lessons for Seaton in other pools."

Cllr Smith said that the council had approached consultants to carry out the review to ensure it was completed on schedule.

He said: "We could have got one of our officers to do it, but they wouldn't have the experience - we want to get it right.

"This firm (Think OTB) has got a proven track record for providing swimming lesson programmes across the country."

But the move has been criticised by Councillor Vivien Pengelly, leader of the council's Tory opposition group.

Cllr Pengelly said: "It beggars belief that a cash-strapped council that cannot afford to keep Seaton Pool open is deciding to buy in consultants to review the swimming lesson timetable.

"Where is this money coming from and why can't this be done in-house?"