

NEW MOVE IN BATTLE FOR POOL

EVENING HERALD THURSDAY 2nd FEBRUARY

CONSERVATIVE and Liberal Democrat councillors were expected to make an official complaint today about the decision to close the city's Seaton Pool.

At a packed public meeting at Eggbuckland Community College last night, shadow council leader Cllr Vivien Pengelly said she – and other councillors – would complain to Plymouth City Council's chief executive, Barry Keel.

Confusion surrounded the meeting as to who was 'to blame' for the closure following reports that the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) says it is still willing to negotiate over the plans – while the council has for months insisted that it was the RDA which said the pool should shut.

The council's Labour cabinet members agreed in November to close the pool after hearing that the facility was costing the council £160,000 a year.

But Cllr Pengelly told the meeting: "It may even be that some cabinet members have been misled.

"We want this decision to be reviewed."

by MATT FLEMING

Herald Reporter

More than 150 campaigners opposed to the pool's closure turned out last night.

Officials from the RDA and Labour councillors were invited – but none attended.

It was a charged meeting, with many people vowing to carry on the fight to save the pool, which is to close in April.

There were shouts of "Plymouth needs more leisure facilities – not less" throughout.

This will be the second pool closure within three years, following the closure of the Ballard Centre in 2003. The council says it has no immediate plans to build another pool in the north of the city.

Cllr Pengelly, at the meeting, suggested shutting the Plymouth Dome for three months over the winter and taking away some of the council members' recently-increased allowances to pay for the upkeep of Seaton Pool.

She also suggested the pool could be taken on by a charitable trust.

The decision to close it should go to a 'free vote', Cllr Pengelly said,

where every council member could vote independent of Party control. She said there were Labour councillors who were themselves 'terribly upset' over the closure plans.

"This is a big issue, so we should get a free vote," she said. "It takes a strong will to do a U-turn."

Dr David Salter, the Tories' shadow cabinet member for health, wrote to the Prime Minister last month in the hope that £4million for another swimming pool could be found.

He is yet to receive a reply, but told the meeting: "This is becoming a really major issue for confidence in the management of leisure facilities in the city – and, indeed, for the conduct of democracy in this city."

Roger Bossom, treasurer of the Devonport Royal Swimming Association, which is behind the campaign to save the pool, encouraged the people to carry on the fight and backed the Conservative and Lib Dem plans to complain officially.

He said: "We have blamed the RDA in the past for their intransigent way – but now we have to retract in some way the blame we have apportioned."

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