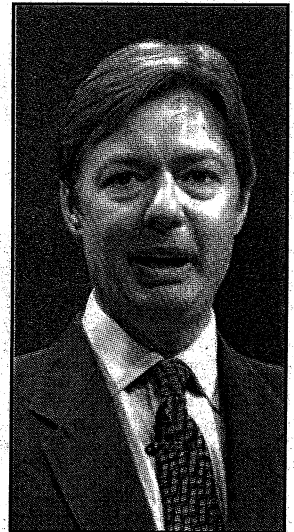


# Council decision 'does not fit with obesity strategy'

# MP TACKLES MINISTER OVER POOL CLOSURE



**CHALLENGE:** Gary Streeter questioned Phil Woolas

THE Government has been challenged over how the controversial closure of a city swimming pool fits in with its declared aim of tackling health and obesity problems.

The city council's move to shut Seaton Pool, which has sparked public outrage, was raised with Ministers by Tory MP for South West Devon Gary Streeter.

But the Government said the decision was a matter for the council, and highlighted assurances given that users would have access to alternative facilities.

A report published this week shows obesity nationally has increased from 9.6 per cent of youngsters in 1995 to 13.7 per cent in 2003.

The council's Labour cabinet members agreed in November

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to close the pool after hearing it cost £160,000 a year to run.

It plans to relocate schools and swimming clubs to Central Park and the College of St Mark and St John. There are also plans for plans for a £50million 'life centre' in Central Park, to include an Olympic-sized pool.

But the move has provoked an angry public backlash.

In a Parliamentary question, Mr Streeter asked what assessment the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had made as to whether closing Seaton Pool was in keeping with national policies on health and obesity.

Minister for Local Government Phil Woolas replied: "The decision to close Seaton Pool was taken by Plymouth City Council and is a matter for them.

"We understand the council has given assurances that users of the pool will have access to alternative facilities."

Seaton Pool, on the Plymouth International Business Park, was inherited from the armed forces when Seaton Barracks closed. The council says it would cost more than £1million to bring the ageing building up to scratch. The council's lease on the site expired two years ago.

Earlier this week, a joint report by the National Audit Office (NAO), the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission warned the Government was at risk of missing its target of halting rising childhood obesity by 2010 unless further steps were taken to tackle the problem.

It estimated the overall cost of obesity to the NHS at around £1billion, with a further cost of £2.3billion to £2.6billion for the economy as a whole.