Is Your School Buying Energy at the Right Time

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School Energy Strategy

Is Your School Buying Energy at the Right Time, or Just When the Contract Runs Out?

Energy procurement is often triggered by an approaching expiry date. But the strongest decisions begin earlier, with contract clarity, consumption insight and an understanding of the market.

Renewal dates are deadlines
Price is only part of the decision
Expert insight from Better Connected

For many schools, energy procurement begins with an email.

The current contract is approaching its end date. Renewal quotes are available. Someone needs to make a decision.
The school compares the options, selects a contract and moves on.
On the surface, it is a perfectly logical procurement process.
But energy specialists argue that starting the conversation when a contract is close to expiry can mean schools are allowing the renewal date, rather than a considered procurement strategy, to dictate when they buy.
Energy markets do not move according to the academic calendar.
Wholesale prices can change as a result of weather, supply concerns, geopolitical events, storage levels and wider market sentiment.
The Department for Education itself describes energy as a challenging category for schools to buy, with prices moving regularly and contracts sometimes difficult to compare.
For schools considering their procurement route, the fundamental question remains:
When should the energy buying conversation actually begin?

The Renewal Date Should Be a Deadline, Not a Strategy

Better Connected, an advisory led energy and carbon consultancy working with school estates, believes energy procurement should start with understanding the school's position rather than immediately requesting supplier quotes.
That means looking at existing contracts, renewal windows, consumption and the shape of demand across the estate.
A school might know its annual electricity consumption.
But when is that electricity actually being used?
A boarding school with accommodation operating seven days a week has a very different consumption profile from a term time day school.
Swimming pools, commercial kitchens, sports halls, older heating systems and multiple buildings can all influence demand.
For multi academy trusts, the picture becomes even more complicated.
Individual academies may have different contract end dates and separate supply arrangements.
Treating the entire estate as one blanket renewal may be administratively convenient, but it can obscure important differences between sites.

“**The procurement conversation should begin with the estate, not the quote.** Understanding the contract position, renewal windows and consumption profile gives schools a much stronger basis for deciding when and how to buy.
Better Connected | Expert Energy Insight
Better Connected’s approach is to assess individual supplies and compare tender options across ten or more suppliers and multiple contract lengths.
The objective is not simply to identify the lowest headline quote.
It is to understand which contract structure best fits the estate.

Cheapest Does Not Always Mean Best Value

The unit rate is naturally the number that attracts attention during an energy tender.
But contracts with similar headline prices can contain materially different terms.
Schools should consider whether costs are all inclusive or passed through, what happens when the contract expires and whether volume tolerance clauses could affect the organisation.
Deemed rate exposure is another area that should not be ignored.
If an organisation continues consuming energy without an appropriate contracted arrangement in place, it may be charged under deemed or out of contract terms.
For Better Connected, contract review is therefore part of the procurement process before a recommendation is made.
The consultancy’s position is that schools should understand not only the price they are accepting, but the commercial consequences of the terms surrounding it.
Key Takeaway

The cheapest unit rate is not necessarily the strongest energy decision if the contract structure creates additional risk, cost or uncertainty later.

What Does Market Timing Actually Mean?

Trying to predict the absolute bottom of the wholesale energy market is unrealistic.
Market timing should not be confused with gambling on the perfect day to buy.
Instead, it is about understanding the school’s current position against market

conditions and making a reasoned decision.
Better Connected uses a structured market intelligence process that tracks wholesale movements, policy changes and supplier behaviour against the client's contracts and renewal windows.
The output, the consultancy says, should be a clear recommendation.

Fix

Secure a contract where the market position and organisational risk support acting now.

Wait

Continue monitoring where there is sufficient time and a clear rationale for delaying the decision.

Restructure

Review contract lengths, supply arrangements or the way the wider estate is being procured.

Challenge

Question existing arrangements, charges or supplier positions where the evidence supports doing so.
Crucially, the reasoning should also be visible.
This matters in education, where procurement decisions may need to be explained to senior leadership teams, trustees or governors.
A recommendation of "this is the cheapest quote" is relatively limited.
A recommendation that explains the market position, contract term, risk exposure and rationale gives decision makers a stronger basis for scrutiny.

Who Is Advising the School, and How Are They Paid?

There is another question that schools should include in their energy procurement review.

How is the intermediary recommending the contract being paid?
Better Connected publishes its own commission model openly.
The consultancy is not paid through a one off finder's fee. Its advisory function is funded through a commission built into the unit rate for the full duration of the contract.
Better Connected says the value of the commission and whether the rates available from suppliers differ are disclosed to the client in writing before anything is signed.
The company describes the structure as an ongoing advisory retainer rather than a transaction fee.

Questions Schools Should Ask Their Energy Adviser

- How are you paid?
- Is commission included within the unit rate?
- What is the expected value of that commission?
- Do commission rates differ between suppliers?
- What ongoing support continues after the contract is signed?

In practical terms, Better Connected says its commission structure funds support throughout the contract, including market intelligence, billing audits, supplier dispute management, non commodity cost management and access to a named portfolio manager.
The model itself is less important than the transparency principle it highlights.
Schools should understand who is being paid, how much they are expected to earn and whether the commercial arrangement could influence the options being presented.
If those questions are difficult to answer, school leaders should ask why.

Five Questions to Ask Before the Next Energy Renewal

1

What does our consumption profile actually look like?

Understand when energy is being used and how different facilities or sites

influence demand.
2

Are we starting the procurement process early enough?

Treat the renewal date as the deadline for a decision rather than the first trigger to request quotes.
3

What sits behind the headline unit rate?

Review pass through costs, contract clauses, tolerance provisions and expiry exposure.
4

Why is the adviser recommending this option?

Ask for the market, contractual and risk rationale behind the recommendation.
5

How is the adviser being paid?

Request the commission structure, expected value and supplier differences in writing.

Start the Energy Conversation Earlier

Energy procurement should not be a panic triggered by a contract expiry reminder.
Schools and trusts need time to understand their consumption, examine their existing contractual position and consider the available procurement routes.
The right route will depend on the organisation.
What should remain consistent is the quality of the decision making.
Understand the estate.
Know the renewal windows.
Review the contract terms.
Ask how advisers are paid.
And make the decision based on evidence.
Because the best time to start thinking about the next energy contract is rarely the week the current one runs out.

Expert Insight

Expert insight provided by **Better Connected**, an advisory led energy and carbon consultancy supporting schools and multi site estates with energy procurement, market intelligence, billing audits and ongoing energy advisory.

Speak to Better Connected

For advice on energy procurement, contract timing and understanding the options available to your school or trust, contact the Better Connected team.

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