

# Preparing for the 2024 Budget: A Leadership Blueprint for UK Schools

22 October 2024



**We know that every Budget announcement brings with it a wave of anticipation, uncertainty, and, in some cases, opportunity. The 2024 UK Budget, due to be revealed in November, is no different. The education sector is facing unprecedented challenges—rising operational costs, stretched resources, recruitment difficulties, and an urgent need for mental health and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) support.**

While the specifics of the Budget are not yet public, school leaders need to prepare now. The following guide is not just about waiting for announcements; it's about proactive leadership, planning for multiple scenarios, and ensuring your school is positioned to thrive, regardless of the outcome. Here's how.

## **1. Budget Scenarios: Prepare for Every Possibility**

Whether the Budget brings increased funding, freezes current levels, or targets only specific areas, waiting until after the announcement to act is a reactive strategy. As school leaders, we must anticipate these scenarios now.

### **What to Do Now:**

- **Develop Flexible Financial Plans:** Create three financial

forecasts—best-case, middle-case, and worst-case scenarios. Consider what each means for your staffing, programs, and day-to-day running costs. For example, how will you manage if energy costs continue to rise without extra funding?

- **Identify Non-Negotiables:** What are the core elements of your school that must be protected at all costs? Whether it's safeguarding mental health support or preserving classroom budgets, outline what you cannot compromise on, regardless of financial constraints.
- **Engage Your Finance Team:** Work closely with your finance team or external advisors to ensure you're ready to act as soon as the Budget details are clear. Don't wait until the announcement to start conversations about how your school's finances may need to adapt.

**Proactive leadership means preparing for all outcomes before they become reality.**

## **2. Energy Costs: Turning Crisis into Opportunity**

The energy crisis has been front-page news, and schools are no exception to the sharp rise in utility bills. But what can school leaders do beyond waiting for potential relief? Now is the time to lead your school towards energy efficiency and long-term sustainability.

### **What to Do Now:**

- **Leverage the £500 Million Energy Efficiency Grant:** Announced in 2023, this funding is aimed at helping schools become more energy-efficient. Take immediate action by applying for grants to improve insulation, install energy-efficient lighting, or explore renewable energy solutions like solar panels. These upgrades can significantly reduce operational costs over time.
- **Conduct an Energy Audit:** How efficient is your current energy usage? An audit will reveal where you are wasting resources and where quick, cost-effective improvements can be made. Many local authorities offer assistance with these audits, or you can hire external experts to guide you.
- **Collaborate for Bulk Purchasing:** Partnering with other schools to negotiate bulk energy purchasing agreements can drive down costs.

Explore the possibility of forming or joining local energy consortia to benefit from economies of scale.

**School leaders can turn the energy crisis into an opportunity for long-term savings. Waiting for the Budget to solve this problem for you will only increase pressure in the short term.**

### **3. SEND and Mental Health Funding: Advocate for What Matters Most**

SEND services and mental health support are two of the most underfunded and yet most critical areas in education today. The 2024 Budget could introduce new funding in these areas, but school leaders must be prepared to advocate for more, no matter what is announced.

#### **What to Do Now:**

- **Maximize Existing SEND Funding:** While we await the details of the Budget, schools should already be working closely with local authorities to ensure they are receiving their fair share of existing SEND funding. Recent increases of £2.6 billion as part of the 2024-2025 spending review aim to expand SEND places and mental health support.
- **Implement the SEND Green Paper Reforms:** The government's SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper is a roadmap to improving SEND services. Familiarize yourself with the reforms and ensure that your school is in sync with the latest policy shifts. Advocate for their swift implementation in your local authority.
- **Focus on Early Intervention for Mental Health:** The £10 million expansion of the Wellbeing for Education Return program provides a crucial lifeline. As school leaders, ensuring that staff are equipped with the tools to support early mental health intervention is key. Engage in the free training and resources available to bolster your school's mental health capacity.
- **Establish Mental Health Hubs:** If your school is located in an area included in the government's new mental health hub pilots, take advantage of this initiative immediately. If not, begin conversations with local MPs and authorities to lobby for future inclusion, ensuring your students have access to vital resources sooner rather than later.

**Leadership means advocating not only for your school's immediate needs but also for long-term improvements in critical areas like SEND and mental health. Don't wait for the government to fully solve the issue—take action now to ensure your school isn't left behind.**

#### **4. Staffing and Recruitment: Preparing for Budget Realities**

Recruitment challenges are expected to remain a central concern for schools, and while the government has pledged a £30,000 starting salary for new teachers by 2025, the full impact of this promise won't be felt immediately. In the meantime, schools must develop their own strategies to attract and retain talent in a competitive market.

#### **What to Do Now:**

- **Invest in Professional Development:** Schools that prioritize professional development (PD) are more likely to retain staff. Use available funding, such as the **National Professional Qualifications (NPQ)** program, to offer leadership and subject-specific training for your staff. This not only improves teacher satisfaction but also bolsters the quality of education.
- **Reimagine Well-Being Initiatives:** As workloads continue to rise, teacher burnout remains a significant issue. Lead the charge in reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, encouraging a work-life balance, and creating a culture where staff feel supported. This doesn't require significant funding, just thoughtful, compassionate leadership.
- **Get Creative with Recruitment:** If your school is struggling to recruit new teachers, consider how you can make your school more attractive. Offering housing assistance, flexible working options, or other incentives can make a significant difference in attracting talent—especially in areas where living costs are high.

**Being prepared means leading your school through recruitment challenges by offering a supportive, growth-focused environment that retains talent and attracts the best.**

#### **5. Stay Engaged: Budget Monitoring and Policy Updates**

The new Budget will undoubtedly bring policy changes that directly affect

schools. Once announced, school leaders must quickly digest and respond to the details, ensuring that their schools are positioned to benefit from new opportunities or adapt to new constraints.

### **What to Do Now:**

- **Stay Connected to DfE Guidance:** As soon as the Budget is announced, the Department for Education will issue detailed guidance on how new funding and policy shifts will impact schools. Make sure you're on top of these updates and understand what they mean for your specific school context.
- **Engage with Local Education Networks:** School leadership doesn't happen in isolation. By engaging with local headteacher networks, academy groups, or consortia, you can gain valuable insights into how other leaders are navigating the new Budget and share best practices.

**Leading through uncertain times means staying informed and ready to act quickly when new policy or funding announcements are made.**

### **The Leadership Challenge: Be Ready, Be Proactive**

As school leaders, we don't have the luxury of waiting passively for the 2024 Budget to be announced. Preparing for every eventuality, advocating for your school's needs, and taking proactive steps now will ensure that your school is ready to thrive—no matter what the Budget delivers.

Leadership is about being ready to navigate uncertainty with confidence, ensuring that your school is not only surviving but flourishing in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

The 2024 Budget will come and go, but the actions we take today will define the success of our schools tomorrow.