Schools Deserve Commercial-Grade Energy Procurement Support

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ENERGY STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS

Why The School Network is helping schools make better-informed energy decisions

Helping schools access stronger strategy, compare procurement routes properly and reduce unnecessary energy costs.

Energy is no longer a simple utility renewal

It is now a major budget, procurement, estate and risk-management decision. Across schools, academies and trusts, energy now touches almost every part of operational planning.

CORE AIM

For many school business leaders, CFOs, COOs, estates teams and trust executives, the challenge is not whether energy matters. It is how to make the right decision in a complex and fast-moving market.

The recent DfE Energy for Schools benchmarking report has brought this issue back into sharp focus. It highlights the potential for schools to achieve savings through the Energy for Schools route, but it also reinforces a much wider point: schools need clear, independent comparison before committing to any energy procurement route.

Understanding supplier, broker, framework and direct-buying options before committing to a route.

Reviewing unit rates, standing charges, fees, commissions and total contract cost.

Using data, metering and estate insight to identify unnecessary consumption.

Connecting procurement with estate planning, carbon reduction and future energy needs.

Schools are managing commercial-scale energy costs

Many schools now operate buildings and estates with energy demands comparable to sizeable commercial organisations. Large secondary schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges, sports facilities, catering operations, swimming pools, nurseries, extended-use buildings and complex multi-site estates can all carry significant electricity and gas usage.

A large commercial organisation with the same level of energy use would rarely leave procurement to a last-minute renewal conversation. It would treat energy as a strategic cost category, review consumption data, compare fixed and flexible purchasing options, interrogate supplier terms and connect procurement to wider estate planning.

“Schools can carry commercial-scale energy costs, but they are not always given commercial-grade procurement support.”

The issue is not only price — it is strategy

Energy procurement is often judged by the headline unit rate. But the best decision is not always the cheapest-looking quote on the page. Schools need to understand the full picture.

Key areas to review

- Contract end dates
- Notice periods
- Out-of-contract risk
- Unit rates and standing charges
- Non-commodity charges
- Fixed, flexible and variable options
- Metering arrangements
- Half-hourly data
- VAT and Climate Change Levy treatment
- Billing accuracy
- Broker fees and commissions
- Supplier terms
- Renewal timing
- Future site changes

 Carbon and estate priorities

Schools are not restricted to one route

Schools are not limited to one single route when buying energy. DfE guidance recognises that schools can buy energy through a number of routes, including DfE-approved frameworks, local authority agreements, other suitable compliant frameworks, brokers or third-party intermediaries, and direct from suppliers.

The key requirement is that whichever route is selected, it must be compliant with procurement regulations, follow the school's own approval process, meet the school's needs and give the school a clear understanding of the total contract cost.

The point is not to push every school toward the same answer.

The point is to help every school make the right decision for its own circumstances.

Why independent TPI support matters

A third-party intermediary, or TPI, can include an energy broker, consultant, public buying organisation or procurement adviser that supports schools with energy buying.

 Energy contract reviews

 Renewal planning

 Usage and consumption analysis

 Bill validation

 VAT and CCL checks

 Metering reviews

 Supplier comparison

 Framework comparison

 Broker fee transparency

 Budget planning

 Solar PV readiness

 Estate energy strategy

The right broker should be transparent

The School Network is not simply championing broker involvement. We are championing the right kind of broker involvement. Schools need transparent, accountable and properly appointed energy advisers.

A good broker should explain how quotes compare, identify the full cost of supply, highlight contract risks and help the school avoid poor renewal timing, out-of-contract rates, billing errors and hidden charges.

Better procurement should also mean lower usage

Energy strategy is not only about buying better. It is also about using less.

The strongest outcomes come from combining better procurement with better energy management: reviewing heating schedules, checking meter data, assessing building controls, identifying waste and considering technologies such as LED lighting, solar PV, battery storage and building management systems.

Moving from reactive renewal to planned energy strategy

For too long, many schools have been forced into reactive energy decisions. A renewal letter arrives. A quote is presented. A decision is needed quickly. That is not a strategic approach.

A better approach is to review energy well ahead of renewal, understand the current position, check the available options, assess market timing, review usage data, identify potential savings and agree a clear procurement route before pressure builds.

1. Review

Understand current contracts, usage and renewal dates.

2. Compare

Assess available procurement routes and supplier options.

3. Decide

Make an evidence-led decision based on cost, risk and strategy.

How The School Network is

supporting schools

The School Network is supporting schools, academies and trusts across our network by helping them access suitable energy brokers, TPIs and procurement advisers with experience in the education sector.

This support is designed to help schools:

- Review their current energy position
- Understand renewal dates and notice periods
- Compare available procurement routes
- Assess supplier and framework options
- Review whether DfE Energy for Schools is suitable
- Understand fixed, flexible and variable contracts
- Check billing, VAT and Climate Change Levy treatment
- Review usage and metering data
- Identify potential consumption reduction opportunities
- Understand broker fees and commission structures
- Support compliant, evidence-led decision-making

Schools deserve commercial-grade energy support

A large commercial organisation with the same energy use as a school would not normally leave energy procurement to chance. It would plan, compare, use expertise, challenge price, understand risk and look for savings through both better contracts and reduced consumption.

Schools deserve the same. At a time when education budgets remain under pressure, energy decisions need to be treated with the seriousness they deserve.

SPEAK TO THE SCHOOL NETWORK

Make energy decisions with greater confidence

If your school, academy or trust is reviewing contracts, approaching renewal, comparing suppliers or looking to reduce usage, The School Network can help introduce you to suitable education-sector energy advisers.

Request Energy Support