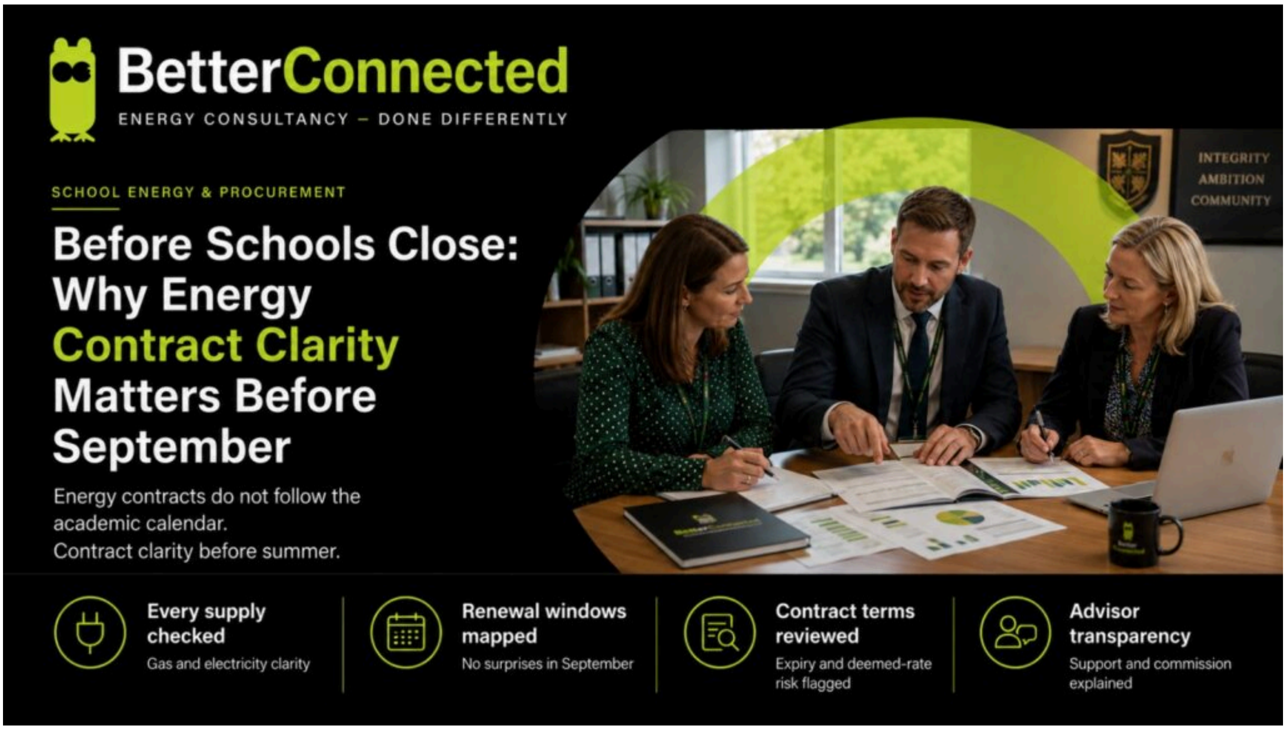
Why Energy Contract Clarity Matters

15 July 2026



School Energy & Procurement

Before Schools Close: Why Energy Contract Clarity Matters Before September

Energy contracts do not follow the academic calendar. As schools prepare for the summer break, understanding exactly where gas and electricity agreements stand could prevent unnecessary pressure when September arrives.

Contract clarity before summer
Renewal timing and procurement risk
Expert insight from Better Connected

As the end of the academic year approaches, school business managers, bursars and estates teams are working through a familiar list of priorities.

Budgets need final checks. Projects are being scheduled for the summer. Contractors need access arrangements. September plans are already competing for attention.

Energy contracts may not be at the top of that list.

But energy specialists are warning that the weeks before schools close could be an important opportunity to establish exactly where an organisation stands with its gas and electricity arrangements.

The reason is simple: energy contracts do not follow the academic calendar.

Wholesale markets continue to move through July and August. Contract end dates do not pause for the summer holidays. Supplier deadlines still apply.

And when September arrives, finance and operational teams are quickly pulled back into the immediate demands of a new school year.

According to **Better Connected**, an advisory led energy and carbon consultancy working with school estates, the first step does not necessarily need to be buying energy.

It is achieving contract clarity.

Do You Know When Every Energy Contract Ends?

It sounds like a basic question.

Yet for a school operating multiple buildings, or a trust responsible for several sites, the answer may be more complicated than expected.

There may be separate gas and electricity contracts. Different sites may have different renewal dates. Half Hourly and non Half Hourly supplies may sit within the same estate.

Historic broker relationships, supplier changes and contracts agreed by previous members of staff can add another layer of complexity.

Better Connected's approach is to assess each supply individually rather than treating a multi site estate as one blanket renewal.

The consultancy currently manages 58 school energy supplies across four independent school estates, including day and boarding settings and a two school group operating under common ownership.

"**Before considering a new contract, schools need to establish the facts.** Who supplies each site? When does every contract end? What happens at expiry?

And who is actually responsible for managing the relationship?
Better Connected | Expert Energy Insight
These are questions that are much easier to resolve while the relevant finance, estates and leadership contacts are still available.

Why Waiting Until September Can Create Pressure

The Department for Education has described energy as one of the trickiest categories for schools to buy.
Prices can move regularly and contracts can be difficult to compare. Crucially, where an energy contract expires without a new arrangement in place, a school could find itself exposed to higher deemed or out of contract rates.
Better Connected argues that a contract end date should be treated as a deadline, not the point at which procurement begins.
The consultancy starts with the organisation's current contractual position and consumption profile.
For schools, the shape of energy demand can vary significantly.
A term time day school has a different consumption profile from a boarding school operating throughout the week. Swimming pools, commercial kitchens, sports facilities, older heating systems and extended community use can all influence demand.
Understanding that profile takes time. So does reviewing contract terms and comparing supplier options across different contract lengths.
Better Connected says every tender it undertakes is priced across ten or more suppliers and compared across multiple term lengths.
Leaving that process until a contract is close to expiry can turn a strategic decision into an urgent one.

Clarity Comes Before the Quote

One of the recurring problems in commercial energy procurement is the temptation to begin with price.
"What rate can you get us?"
It is an understandable question, particularly when school budgets remain under sustained pressure.

But Better Connected’s view is that the quote should come after the school understands its current position.
A headline unit rate does not reveal the full contractual picture.
Pass-through versus all inclusive costs, break clauses, deemed rate exposure, auto renewal triggers and volume tolerance clauses can all have financial consequences.
Key Takeaway

A contract end date should be the deadline for completing an informed procurement process, not the date a school starts asking for energy quotes.

Schools Should Also Ask How Their Adviser Is Paid

Contract clarity should extend beyond the supplier.
Schools should also understand the commercial relationship they have with their broker, consultant or third party intermediary.

Transparency Matters

- How is the adviser paid?
- Is commission included within the energy unit rate?
- Does the commission vary between suppliers?
- What support continues after the contract has been signed?

Better Connected is not paid through a one off finder’s fee.
Its advisory function is funded through a commission built into the unit rate, active for the full duration of the contract.
The commission value and whether supplier rates differ are disclosed to the client in writing.
That commercial structure funds the ongoing advisory relationship, including market intelligence, billing review, supplier dispute management and access to a named portfolio manager throughout the life of the contract.
Better Connected’s wider position is that schools should ask any energy adviser the same questions.
Transparency should not depend on which consultancy a school appoints.

Five Energy Questions to Answer Before the Summer Break

1

When do our gas and electricity contracts end?

Check every supply and every site rather than relying on one assumed renewal date.

2

What happens when each contract expires?

Understand deemed rate exposure, renewal provisions and any contractual notice requirements.

3

Who currently manages our energy relationship?

Confirm the supplier, broker or adviser and understand exactly what ongoing support is being provided.

4

How is our energy adviser paid?

Ask for commission arrangements and any differences between supplier rates to be explained in writing.

5

Do we have enough time to make a properly informed decision?

If a contract is approaching expiry, establish the procurement options before September pressures begin.

September Should Not Be the Starting Point

The summer break creates a natural dividing line in the school calendar.
The energy market does not recognise it.

For schools and trusts with contracts approaching renewal, the most valuable action before closing may not be signing a new agreement.
It may simply be getting the full contractual position onto one page.
Every supply.
Every contract end date.
Every renewal provision.
Every adviser relationship.
And every question that needs answering.
Because when staff return in September, energy procurement should ideally be a managed process already underway, not another urgent problem waiting in the inbox.
Expert Insight

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

Speak to Better Connected

For advice on energy contracts, procurement and understanding your school's current energy position, contact the Better Connected team.

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